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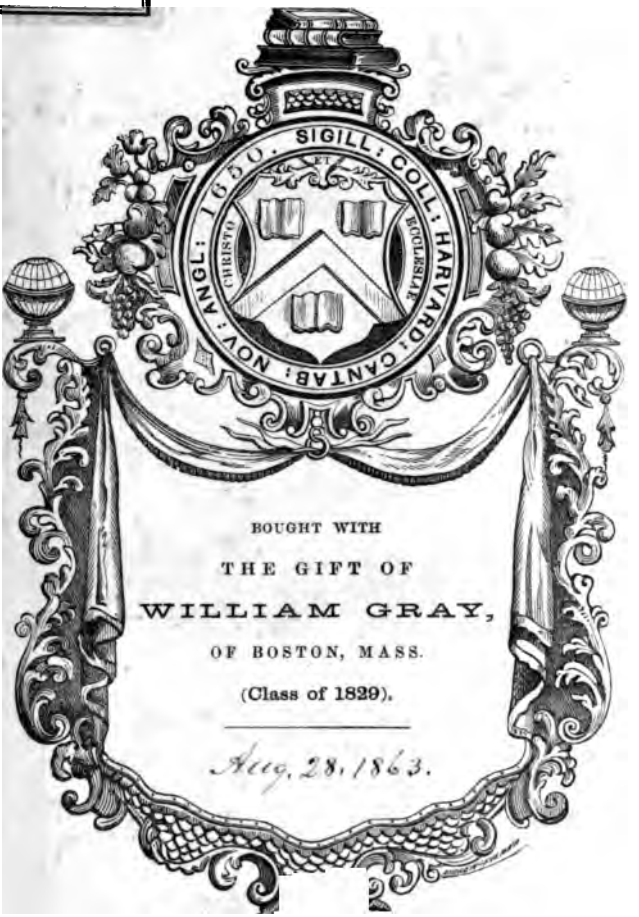

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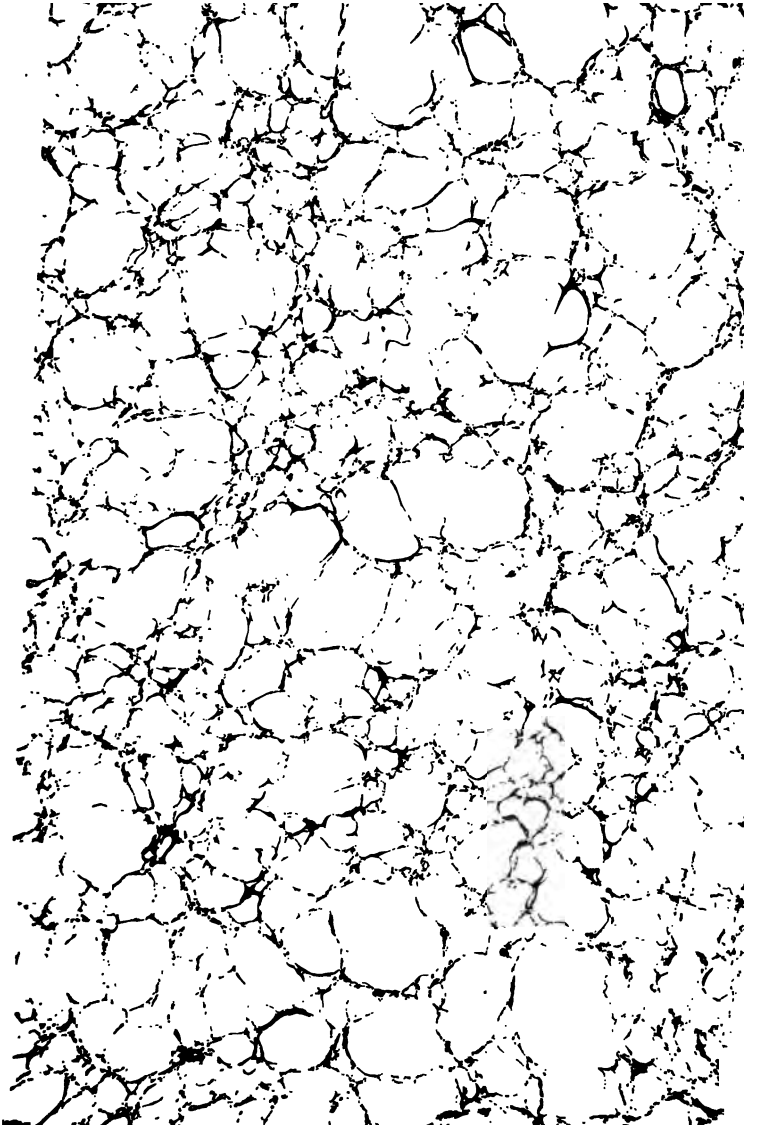

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCCCXXXVI.

URSULA BY ELIZABETH SEWELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

URSULA.

A TALE OF COUNTRY LIFE.

BY

ELIZABETH SEWELL,

AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1863, Aug. 25.

URSULA.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The first waking the next morning would have repaid me for double the pain I had suffered since Roger's absence. It was so wonderfully happy. My nature was not one to dwell long on future troubles, so I took the blessings brought by the present moment, and only felt that Roger was with me and that for the time all must go well. And my feeling was shared by every one in the house. Roger's return was like letting the light of the sun break in upon our sad household. William expanded, as it were, under its influence in a manner which was surprising to me; especially as he had a good deal to make him uncomfortable in other ways. I mentioned that the evening of the wreck he came in shading his face from the light, and putting a handkerchief to his eyes. All that evening he complained of a shooting pain in them, and the next day they were very much inflamed. He had caught cold in them; for in consequence of being so silly as not to take a great coat with him, he had no defence against the snow, and he had been exposed to it a long time. We forced him to send for the Compton doctor, but the lotion which was ordered did no good, and then he said he would see some one in Hove. Instead, however, of letting the doctor come to him, he would go into Hove himself on a day when there was a bitter wind blowing, and of course he returned worse than he went. These things were very vexatious, but I could talk out my troubles to Roger, and that was sufficient comfort to me for the time.

The accounts from Hatton continued very indifferent. Mrs. Morris kept her bed, and Jessie was in constant attendance upon her. Roger and I saw Jessie for a short time the day he drove me over, and she was very pleasant in her behaviour to both of us, — very glad to see Roger, and full of thanks for our coming; but her mind was so engrossed by all the cares pressing upon her, that she did not seem to take in anything else thoroughly. I thought myself how much prettier and more winning she was in this subdued mood than in any of her wilful humours, and I was pleased that Roger should see her to advantage, even though her manner contradicted some of the things I had lately written to him about her. Jessie told me that day that Miss Milicent was actually gone. She had learnt it from some one who came over from Dene, and said that Mr. Macdonald knew it for certain. There was a great deal too much communication kept up still between Dene and Jessie and the Lieutenant. I did not feel at all easy in my mind as to the end.

After Jessie's information, I resolved to make an effort to go and see Mrs. Weir, even at the risk of facing Mrs. Temple, and perhaps offending her. It was a little pleasure to me also whilst Roger was away, for he was obliged to go to London for a few days to see Mr. Pierce's relations. Yet I did not feel comfortable in thinking what kind of reception I might meet with, and I was rather nervous as I rang the bell. The page opened the door, and I asked if I might see Mrs. Weir. He did not know — he would go and see — and he ran off. I stood looking down the road, and saw Mrs. Temple coming up. She was going on beyond the house, but on perceiving me she drew near. I made a curtsy, and said I had walked over to inquire after Mrs. Weir.

"Oh! Mrs. Weir is not at all well to-day."

"I was afraid she might not be, Ma'am," I replied. "Parting with Miss Milicent must have made her anxious."

"Mrs. Weir is too excellent a person to allow herself to be anxious upon any subject," was the answer. "I will tell her that you called."

"I had hoped that I might have seen her, Ma'am," I said. "Having been accustomed to me so long, I fancied it would not make her nervous."

"Mrs. Weir sees no one but her friends," was Mrs. Temple's answer; "I will tell her that you called to inquire, and no doubt she will be much obliged to you."

Just then Mr. Temple and some strange gentlemen came up, and Mr. Temple asked his wife if she was going on farther. I saw she disliked leaving me at the door, and again she repeated, "I will tell Mrs. Weir that you called," — which was as much as to say, "You have come, and now you may go back again," but I kept my stand, waiting for the answer from Mrs. Weir herself.

"Are you ready, my dear?" said Mr. Temple, in his meek voice, and he offered her his arm: she really had no excuse then, and was obliged to depart.

The page came back almost directly afterwards, followed by Cotton. He began telling me that Mrs. Weir was very ill, that she had had a bad night, that she did not see any one, — but Cotton gave him a tap on the shoulder and sent him off to the kitchen, and even before he was out of sight exclaimed, "Little rascal! — he would say his face was copper-coloured for sixpence!"

"Isn't Mrs. Weir ill?" I said. "Can she see me?"

Cotton replied by stepping out into the road, and looking up and down it.

"She is gone. That is her purple bonnet. Now, Miss Grant, if you wish to come you must make the most of your time."

"What does it mean, Cotton?" I exclaimed, "I don't understand."

"Don't ask questions, and you won't have answers. At any rate, seeing you will do my mistress good, for yours will be the first face belonging to any one out of the house that she has caught sight of for the last three weeks."

"Has she been so ill as that?" I inquired.

"Only learning to be quiet, she will tell you," said Cotton.

"Before I would put up with such folly! But we aren't all made alike, that is one blessing."

I followed her, greatly perplexed and pained.

"Mrs. Weir's sitting-room was wanted for any stray visitors," whispered Cotton to me, as she saw me look round the lobby at the stairs, not quite knowing where I was to be taken to. "She has Mr. Temple's little dressing-room fitted up for her now, and her bed-room is along the passage to the right."

"It is not comfortable for her, is it?" I asked; and Cotton shrugged her shoulders, and answered: "We must like what is given us, when we are not mistresses in our own house."

Mrs. Weir looked at least a year older since the last time I had seen her. Her complexion, naturally so singularly clear and smooth, had become withered and sallow, and her eyes were heavy; but she was much more self-controlled, and if I could have felt that her appearance and manner were natural, I might have fancied there was a change for the better.

"You find me in a new room, Ursula," she said, as Cotton left us, and I sat down beside her. "It must seem strange to you."

Yes, it was very strange, so cold-looking, and comfortless! Nothing but Mrs. Weir's work-basket, and a Bible on the table; no flowers even to brighten it.

"I have been here since Milicent left me," she continued. "My niece wished me to be near her; and she has friends coming to see her, so that the house will be full."

"It doesn't look like your room, certainly, Ma'am," I replied.

"You miss the little ornaments; but they were better in the visitors' room; and you know, Ursula, all things increase in value when they give pleasure to others."

"This room is very small, Ma'am," I observed, "and I am afraid you will feel the draught from the door."

"My niece has lent me a thick shawl, and I put it on when I feel the cold. You see, Ursula, I am not fit to travel, because I do feel things so much. My niece tells me that."

Her voice faltered a little, and I heard her murmur to herself, "It is right; God help me; it is all right."

"You will be better, Ma'am, when you have heard from Miss Milicent," I said; "her being away must make you anxious."

"I ought not to be anxious, Ursula. I have so many blessings; and I could not go. Milicent will do without me — she always does without me; but it is lonely, and I wish" — she did not finish the sentence.

"What do you wish, dear Ma'am?" I asked.

"Nothing, Ursula. God has taught me that I must have no wishes," and Mrs. Weir folded her little hands together as a child would do in prayer.

"Only perhaps it would do you good, just to say out your wish, Ma'am," I said; "even if you don't think it right to encourage it."

"No, Ursula; no wishes, no longings."

"Some, dear Ma'am," I exclaimed, "some we must have, whilst we live upon earth."

"If God would grant me to see my duty, clearly," she answered; "I try to understand what they tell me, — yes, I try. But, Ursula, a wife has a great duty to a husband."

"No one would wish you to go to Mr. Weir now, Ma'am," I answered.

"That is what is said. Is it true, Ursula? I made a vow once. Does God forget our vows?"

"He does not wish us to do what is impossible, Ma'am," I replied, "and your friends judge rightly, I am sure, in telling you that you would do harm to yourself, and no good to Mr. Weir, by insisting upon joining him."

"You say so, do you? you are like them all, but I forgot — I am to be quiet. Cotton ought not to have brought you here, it was wrong. My niece would not like me to see you, and she knows what is best. But I am quiet, — only if they would tell me why they allowed Milicent to go without me. Ursula, I will pray. God will help me if I pray."

All the assumed self-control was over. Her hands trembled

violently. I took hold of them to keep them still, but she did not seem to think of my presence as, with her eyes closed, she poured out her prayer with all the simplicity of a child, and the earnestness and devotion of a saint. She prayed for submission, for guidance, for humility and charity. I could with difficulty follow the course of her thoughts. There seemed to be a burden upon her heart, which she could scarcely find words to express.

After a few moments she lay back upon the sofa. I thought she was faint, and offered her a bottle of salts, but she would not take it. "No, Ursula," she said, "I am better now, I will not talk any more; and you had better go."

"I can't leave you alone, Ma'am," I replied.

"Cotton will come to me, and my niece will return. I would rather, Ursula."

"Rather," meant duty not inclination, I was sure, and I felt very determined. "I was in hopes, Ma'am," I said, "that I might have stayed a little with you to tell you about my brother, Roger — the one who went to Canada, you know — he is come back."

Her eyes quite brightened at this little bit of news from the outer world. She said eagerly, "Oh! Ursula, that must be very pleasant; will you not tell me about it? Was that why you did not come to see me? My niece thought you had forgotten me."

"I have had a great deal of trouble, Ma'am," I said, and I began to give her an account of Leah's illness, lengthening out what I had to say, so as to gain her attention thoroughly, and it was quite curious to me to watch the effect my little story had upon her. She laid her hand upon mine when I spoke of the sorrow that had come upon us, smoothing it kindly, and looking at me at the same time intently, and though she grieved with me, and tears stood in her eyes, yet the haggard look passed from her face, until I told her how I had watched Leah, and nursed her, and been with her at her death. Then it came back again most painfully, and she said,

"You have done all you could, Ursula; you have nothing on your conscience, and now God has sent you a reward."

The words gave me a pang, as I thought how little they were deserved. I changed the subject, knowing what was in her thoughts, and spoke of Roger, but I could not seize upon her attention again, and as she looked towards the door nervously, I felt that I had been there long enough.

I rose to go, promising to come and see her again, but I had no response. It almost seemed that she wished me not to come, for she only said, "Yes, Ursula, when you have time; but you are very busy, and you have your brother."

I did not notice the change in her manner, and insisted upon placing the cushions comfortably, and throwing a shawl over her, as in the good old days at Dene. Just as I was leaving the room, I said, "I think I must send you over a few crocuses and snow-drops, Ma'am, from Sandcombe. You don't seem to have any, and you used to like them so much."

"Oh! Ursula; thank you, indeed that will be so kind; but my niece would like some for the visitors' room, if you could spare them. She says we must all try and make that pretty and comfortable for her friends." I made no more offers. If it had been possible to be angry with Mrs. Weir, I think I should have been then.

Cotton was keeping guard in the lobby. I was going downstairs, but she hurried me away to her own room — a little attic.

"I shall get into a scrape for this," she said; "but I couldn't help it. I couldn't bear it any longer by myself."

"I don't understand it all," I said.

"How should you, or any one who doesn't live in the house? I thought Mr. Richardson might have been of use, but she's too much for him."

"She! who? Mrs. Weir?"

"No, no; how foolish! Mrs. Temple. She keeps him at arm's length. Ever since Miss Milicent went has he been trying to get in, and never succeeded once."

"But why not?" I exclaimed; "why shouldn't he come?"

"Just sit down, and I'll tell you;" and Cotton gave me a chair and seated herself on a trunk, delighted, as I perceived, to have some one to whom to pour out her troubles. It seemed that ever since the first news had been heard of Mr. Weir, Mrs. Weir's nervousness and fidgets, as Cotton called them, had increased tenfold. It was the old feeling which we had battled with at Dene, only much more vehement. Mrs. Weir could never have loved her husband, latterly she must have been very unhappy with him; yet she had kept herself up by the one principle which was, in fact, all the strength of mind she possessed, — a sense of religious duty. But for this she might long ago have been considered incapable of judgment upon any subject. I suppose, naturally enough in her state of health, the principle had become exaggerated. She was morbid in her conscientiousness, but still it was the only thing to rest upon in dealing with her. In the present instance I gathered from what Cotton said, that she might have been managed easily enough but for Miss Milicent's wilfulness. If any one else had been sent to find Mr. Weir, and inquire into his condition, Mrs. Weir would, at least for a while, have been satisfied; but the moment Miss Milicent talked of going, Mrs. Weir became excited, and said she must go too, — and the idea so possessed her that it became a kind of monomania.

"I should have given in to her," I exclaimed, as Cotton told me this.

"So should I," she replied. "Mrs. Weir is just one of those odd, nervous perrons, who can do wonderful things when they have their own way, and can't stir an inch when they have not. I heard Mr. Richardson say this myself to Mrs. Temple. He did all he could to keep Miss Milicent from her wild scheme, and I know he put before her the harm all the fuss was doing her mother, — but you might as well have talked to a stone wall; and then he took the other tack, and turned to Mrs. Temple, hoping something might be managed to satisfy Mrs. Weir, — and there was another stone wall."

"He must have had enough to do with them all," I said.

"You would think so if you had known everything that went on; how we used to be kept up, night after night, — Mrs. Temple preaching to my poor mistress about patience, and trying her so that she must have been better than Job if she had not been impatient, and at last sending her off into hysterics; and Miss Milicent coming in in the middle, with worries about her boxes, and what she should take, and what she should leave behind, and never seeing that the very mention of packing set Mrs. Weir off worse than ever."

"Mrs. Weir is quiet enough, now," I said.

"Hasn't she been tutored, — fairly tutored and trained into it? But the trouble is not over."

"I suppose Mrs. Temple did only what she thought was for the best," I said.

Cotton gave a little contemptuous laugh. "Why, Miss Grant, you are not taken in by her, are you? She thinks it the best for herself that Mrs. Weir should stay, there is no doubt of that. If she did not, my poor mistress would have been off for France, or for Australia, or for any other country by the next packet."

"I don't precisely see what good it can do Mrs. Temple to have Mrs. Weir here," I said, "she can be only a trouble."

"There is a house to be kept up," replied Cotton.

"Yes," I said, "but Mrs. Weir's income is very small."

"Not so small but that it helps Mrs. Temple pretty considerably; that I know from good authority," continued Cotton. "And just see in what a style we have things, — footman, and page, and pony-carriage, and gardener. Mrs. Temple didn't live in that way in her own home, and she would not live so here, if it was not for Mrs. Weir's help. She has all the money in her own hands and she doesn't choose it should go out of them."

"Still," I said, not choosing to own to Cotton how much I agreed as to her opinion of Mrs. Temple, "it was best for Mrs. Weir to stay."

"That may or mayn't be," replied Cotton. "As you yourself said just now, Miss Grant, when her heart was so

set upon it, I should have run the risk. But I wouldn't quarrel about the plan, only the way it has been managed. If ever there was a hard gaoler it's Mrs. Temple. You must have seen enough yourself to make you guess that."

"I see that Mrs. Weir is afraid of Mrs. Temple," I said, "and I don't like her being moved into that small room, and not having everything comfortable about her."

"Oh! that's sacrifice, discipline," exclaimed Cotton; "I know the words by heart, for I've heard nothing else since we came to Stonecliff. If it's possible, Miss Grant, for a woman to make her way to Heaven by proxy, depend upon it that woman's Mrs. Temple. Why there isn't a duty that she has to perform which she doesn't make some one or another do for her. Miss Milicent — she sees the poor for her, and goes to the school; and Mr. Temple, he pays her visits, and writes her letters; and Mrs. Weir finds money for charity, and gives up all her little comforts to make things pleasant to the visitors, and Mrs. Temple counts up all that is done, and takes the sum total to herself."

"I can't bear to hear you talk so, Cotton," I said. "I don't believe it can be true."

"Just come here for a month, and see if it isn't," exclaimed Cotton. "A month! why you'd find it out in a week! I have gone in and out of the room whilst visitors have been there, and have heard her go on — 'We do this, and, we do that' — till, you wouldn't believe it, but I have been almost taken in myself; and no wonder my poor mistress is."

"Then it was not Mrs. Weir's wish to change her room?" I asked.

"No more than it is to cut her head off. It was all done by Mrs. Temple's preaching about sacrifice and discipline. Mrs. Temple has the command of the whole house, and goes where she likes, and does what she likes; and because she is in the drawing-room all day, and does not want a sitting-room to herself, she made my poor mistress fancy that it was too great a luxury for her to have the comfortable south room, which she chose when she came here; and so, after Miss

Milicent was gone, and when there was actually an additional spare bed-room, she teased her into moving into that little poky dressing-room."

"Miss Milicent ought not to have gone," I could not help saying.

"She wasn't much good when she was here," continued Cotton; "she never saw anything that went on."

Cotton was mistaken there. Miss Milicent, I was sure, saw a great deal, only with her awkwardness she did not know how to remedy it. I felt really afraid for Mrs. Weir, especially as Cotton continued her tissue of complaints, which might indeed be exaggerated, but for which I could scarcely doubt there was a foundation of truth. She had her own special grievance, which was natural enough; it was one which the servants could not help feeling, — Mrs. Temple's stinginess. I was aware of the characteristic, but I confess I was not prepared for all the little ways in which Cotton declared it was shown. The Dene housekeeping had been lavish, wrongly so very often, and no doubt there was much which required correction; but I could feel keenly with Cotton when she described how even the char-woman's wages were cut down, and all kinds of makeshifts forced upon the kitchen in order to make a show in the parlour.

What I heard was very painful to me, and as for remedying any part of the evil, I saw no way to it. For unless Mr. and Mrs. Richardson were freely admitted to the house, there were none of Mrs. Weir's friends near to be aware how things went on, or to take her part.

"Mrs. Temple is very jealous of you, Miss Grant," said Cotton, as the conversation ended, "and I don't know whether it isn't as much as my place is worth to have let you in now. But I felt I must get hold of you, and if you can come over again before long, I'll try and smuggle you in; and if I can't, perhaps you won't mind the trouble of the walk for nothing, for I assure you it's charity."

Cotton did not feel the difficulty which was present to me. Mrs. Temple was the mistress of the house. If she did not

like me to go there openly, I could not be smuggled in by the lady's maid — that would be entirely against all my principles, and I felt it would do no good in the end. If I was ever to be allowed to be any comfort to Mrs. Weir, there must be no flaw in my conduct for Mrs. Temple to seize upon. No, I must let it all rest in God's hands, knowing that, when the time came for me to be of use, He would open the door for me.

CHAPTER XLV.

Miss Milicent crossed over to France safely, we heard that from John Hervey, and she was going on to Paris, hoping to find Mr. Weir there, and to be with him in his lodging, and learn his plans, and help him with her advice. It sounded, just at first, very dutiful and self-denying, and I believe Miss Milicent herself thought it so; but, I hope it was not very wicked in me, I could not help remembering that she would find more amusement in Paris than at Stonecliff, and that if her father claimed her on the one side, her mother had an equal claim on the other. I was glad, however, to hear that so far her journey had prospered, and I tried not to be uneasy about what might come afterwards. Some persons might have wondered why I should have cared enough for her to feel anything like uneasiness; but it must be remembered that my circle of interests was small, and that it was in my nature to throw myself very much into other people's concerns. An orphan as I was, and having no sister, I suppose I kept my heart more open than I might otherwise have done, for what befell my friends, especially those connected with my childhood. Many a heart-ache have I had for Mrs. Weir, which I dared not speak of to anyone, not even to kind Mrs. Kemp, knowing she would not understand it.

Roger's stay was uncertain. It depended upon some business connected with Mr. Pierce's affairs; but he had made up his mind that it should not be more than three months; and I knew, he would keep to this determination if possible. We

seldom spoke of the coming final separation. Sometimes I faced it, Sometimes I buoyed myself up with the hope that even yet events might occur to prevent it. I would not let myself be miserable. I only felt that I might be so. And we had soon one engrossing thought at Sandcombe. Mrs. Morris was sinking rapidly. I was with Jessie as much as possible, and William and Roger were both as kind and considerate as could be desired, willing to spare me at all hours, and to put up with any inconvenience, so that the poor child should not be left. It was a trial to William especially to be without me, for, since his eyes had been so bad, he had depended upon me a good deal. I kept all his accounts and read the paper to him in the evening. Roger did this when I was away, besides looking after the farm. William said to me, more than once, that Roger was his right hand, and it would be a bad day when we had to part with him again.

I was with Jessie the night that Mrs. Morris died. The old lady sank quietly, and there was much to comfort us in the circumstances of her death; but Jessie was heart-broken. As I followed her into her room, when all was over helping her to undress and go to bed, she clung to me hysterically, exclaiming, "Keep me with you, Ursie. I have not a relation nor a home." And she said what I knew to be, in a great measure, true.

We took her back with us to Sandcombe on the day of the funeral. It was the only place she could go to. She shared my room; for I did not like her to be alone. Her grief was very touching. I had never seen anything so real and deep; and it brought out all the better parts of her nature. She was earnest, humble, affectionate, and singularly gracious in her thankfulness for everything which was done for her. I was almost sorry to see how she clung to us, knowing, as I did, that there might be a hard lot in store for her — a life amongst strangers.

I knew nothing, for certain, of the condition in which Mrs. Morris had left her affairs; but I had a suspicion, from something which passed between Roger and William on the

day of the funeral, that it was not what had been expected. If this were so, and if Jessie had to make her own way in the world, it would be cruel to delude her by keeping the truth from her. I asked Roger, but he gave me an unusually short answer, and even implied that it was not quite kind to enter upon the subject then. I inquired of William, but he informed me the accounts were not made up; he could tell nothing till they were. This was a week after the funeral.

Jessie came downstairs and sat with us, for the first time, that evening. Before, she had really been too unwell to leave her room; and I had spent a good deal of my spare time with her. But this was dull for William and Roger, and not good for her: so I persuaded her at last to make an effort to join us. She certainly did look uncommonly pretty. Her black dress set off her clear complexion; and she had taken pains with her hair, and made it look particularly nice; and, without meaning to be affected, for I am sure she was not that in the least, there was a little shyness in her manner to William and Roger, caused, I suppose, by the strangeness of her feelings, which, with her grief, gave her the quietness and softness which she sometimes wanted when in high spirits and good health. I asked her to come and sit by me at the tea table, and, wishing to give her something to do, begged her to put the sugar into the cups, whilst I went out into the kitchen to give an order. When I came back I found that Roger was doing it for her, and that she was sitting in the window-seat, away from the fire, crying. It vexed me a little, that she should give way so soon; and, being afraid of showing any particular sympathy, for fear of making her worse, I merely said, — "Come Jessie, dear, tea is ready. Here is a place for you by me."

"It will be cold there, by the door," said Roger: "this is your place, Jessie;" and not seeing that it was inconvenient to me, as it crowded me, he placed a chair for her with her back to the fire.

Her being there just moved William out of the seat which he always preferred, and I did not like him to be turned out

of it, now that his eyes were bad; and I knew he felt the cold. I was sure Jessie would not care, and I said, — "We will have the door shut; but if Jessie does not mind, that is William's place." Jessie was going round to the other side directly, but Roger came up to the table and pushed the tea-tray aside. "Now, there is room for both," he said; and as Jessie looked at me rather apologising for having disturbed me, he added, "Oh! Ursie does not mind; she can make tea just as well at one side of the table as the other."

It would have been foolish to mind such a trifle, but I could not help thinking to myself, what would poor Jessie do if she had to go into the rough world after being so petted as not to be allowed to sit away from the fire. We were rather constrained all tea-time; Jessie scarcely ate anything; and by some unfortunate stupidity we were constantly bringing up subjects which were, in a measure, painful to her.

Yet I thought myself careful. Miss Milicent's journey seemed tolerably safe, and I mentioned it; but then something was said about Lieutenant Macdonald, and I saw Jessie blush and look conscious, and William, with very bad tact and forgetting my warning, was, as usual, going to joke her about him. Only a very few words were said, scarcely enough for Roger to notice; and I was not sure, indeed, whether he heard them, for he was just then lifting the tea-kettle from the hearth. He saw, however, that Jessie was discomposed, and made an effort to put things comfortable again; in fact, both he and William treated her like a petted child, and I could not blame them for it, though I felt in my own mind that it was bad for her.

There were several things to attend to after tea, and I succeeded in making Jessie help me a little, and then I gave her some needlework, and persuaded her to go to bed early, as she had slept badly the previous night. I am sure I felt as kindly towards her as possible, and wished to do everything I could to make her happy again, but, knowing her disposition, I felt that the less fuss made about her the better. And this manner of treating her, it seemed, did not quite please either

of my brothers. As soon as she was gone upstairs they began.

"Ursie," said William, "I think you are rather hard upon poor Jessie. You set her to work as though she was your servant."

"I only wanted to employ her," I replied. "It was better for her than sitting still and thinking."

"When people are in trouble they can't always make up their minds to work," said Roger; and he threw down the newspaper, as though he had a good deal to say upon the subject.

"Jessie certainly is in a great deal of trouble," I said; "no one feels it more than myself; and I would do my very utmost to be kind to her; but I don't think you can know quite so well as I do what is best for a young girl. I am sure she feels obliged to me for giving her something to distract her thoughts."

"You put her on a footing with Martha," said Roger. "She might not thank you so much for that."

"Oh! Roger," I exclaimed, and I felt the colour rush to my cheeks; "you don't mean that Jessie could have an unkind thought of me for that. Why, I help Martha myself every evening. There is not a thing I asked Jessie to do which I would not have done willingly."

"Only, my little Trot has not known what sorrow and changed fortunes make others feel," said Roger, kindly; and he came round to me, and, leaning over my chair, kissed me.

I turned my face up at him, and endeavoured to smile; but my spirit was roused, and I said "Perhaps neither you nor I know that, for we have both been tolerably prosperous. But, Roger, if Jessie's fortunes are changed, there is all the more reason why she shouldn't be spoilt."

"You women are always hard upon one another," exclaimed William.

Tears of vexation filled my eyes. There was nothing I disliked more than that kind of hard nature which tries to subdue sorrow by not allowing that it exists: and I had been

waiting upon Jessie all day, nearly, in one way and another, doing little kindnesses, and putting myself out of my way in a manner my brothers had no notion of; and the very reason why I asked her to help me that evening was that she might feel herself at home. But if they had an impression I was hard it was no use to argue about it, so I made rather a light answer, and said, — "We will ask Jessie this day six months which she thinks her best friend."

"She is not likely to be here then," said William. He spoke somewhat shyly, as though approaching a disagreeable subject.

"Have you had a letter from the lawyer?" exclaimed Roger, turning round shortly.

"A long rigmarole," said William, drawing a paper out of his pocket; "but the upshot of it is that, when all the debts are paid, there will be little enough of a legacy left."

This was the first approach to a statement of Jessie's position which I had heard, and I begged William to explain it more clearly.

"Has Mrs. Morris died so very poor?" I inquired.

"Not so very poor," answered William, shortly; "but Jessie is not her daughter."

How stupid I had been, not to see at once how matters stood! Of course, whatever there might be which was not left to Charles Morris, would most probably belong to William himself, in right of his wife.

"Then Jessie has nothing," I observed; and I suppose my tone showed my disappointment, for William answered directly, —

"You must remember, Ursie, that Jessie has no real claim upon any one, and that Mrs. Morris did for her more than could have been expected in bringing her up. She has left her a legacy of a couple of hundred pounds, and with her pretty face she'll soon make her way in the world."

"But has she two hundred pounds?" said Roger, who had returned to his newspaper.

"The debts may not be so much as we think," answered William.

Roger stood up, turned his back upon William, and faced the fire. A few minutes afterwards he left the room.

Neither William nor I spoke. William sat broodingly by the hearth, and I worked very fast. Presently, when I saw William's head fall back, as though he was asleep, I went out to find Roger. He was in the large parlour, sitting there alone in the dark. I only discovered him by hearing him cough. He laughed when I came in with the candle in my hand, and said the little parlour was so hot.

"Not so hot with the fire as with the conversation," I replied. "What is the matter, old man?" and I rested my hand upon his head, and smoothed his hair.

"William does not mean to do anything but what is just," he exclaimed; "but, Trot, Jessie Lee is an orphan."

"Yes," I said; "and we are the nearest friends, not to call us relations, she has, except Charles Morris. I don't forget it, Roger, though I did ask her to help Martha this evening."

"And two hundred pounds is little enough for her," he continued.

"It won't keep her from working for her bread; but she will be none the worse off for that," I replied.

"Only it ought to be two hundred pounds," he continued; "and William says it won't be near that when the debts are paid."

"I don't understand," was my remark.

"Mrs. Morris drew up her will herself," he said; "so it is oddly enough put together. She has left two thousand pounds to William, as you know."

"I was not told the sum exactly," I replied; "but I knew there was something considerable."

"Well! there are some debts to be paid," continued Roger. "Mrs. Morris evidently did not know how they would mount up, so she has ordered that they should be settled from the same fund out of which Jessie is to have her

money. There is no doubt that she meant the legacy to come first; but she has worded it so as to allow of the debts having the first claim. In that case Jessie will lose half her legacy."

"But William and Charles Morris will surely undertake to pay the debts, if there is not enough in any other way?" I said.

"Charles Morris says no," replied Roger; "and William is all for law and justice; and he has had a lawyer's opinion, and the debts are to come first and the legacy second."

"It can't be!" I exclaimed. "It is cruelty: actually taking the orphan's money! And William so well to do in the world, and having no children, — not even like Charles Morris in that respect!"

"It is law," was all Roger's answer.

It came to my lips to say, "That is harder dealing than asking Jessie to help Martha;" but it would have been mean to taunt him, and, besides, I was myself sorely troubled.

"We mustn't allow it," I said, after a little thought. "Roger, I have money of my own. I would rather part with every penny of it than that Jessie Lee should have less than was intended for her."

"My own honest little Trot! Yes, I know you would. But it won't come to that; there are other ways and means."

"Not breaking in upon your money!" I exclaimed. "You told me the other day of what consequence it was to you just now to have every penny you could lay your hands on."

"There is a greater consequence than that, Ursie, — to do justly in God's sight. But I have not made up my mind. I don't know what I shall do. Be off now! I shall go and smoke my pipe. It will all be right."

CHAPTER XLVI.

I HAD not seen Mrs. Kemp for weeks; and I thought it would do Jessie good to go out a little; so the next day being very fine, I had the chaise ordered, that I might drive her

over myself to Longside. I wanted, too, to make Mrs. Kemp better acquainted with her; for I knew she was prejudiced against her, and really Jessie seemed now so much improved, that I felt this to be in a certain degree unfair. Roger came to the door to see us off: he was just the same as usual, — not at all put out, apparently, by what had passed the previous evening; but he said he must go over to Mr. Stewart at Hatton, and have a little talk with him about Canada business. It would not do to be dawdling on in England much longer. That was not a very enlivening speech to hear, just as I was setting out with Jessie; and she herself seemed hurt by it, and, when he was gone, turned to me, and observed, she did not know what Sandcombe would be like without him. It would be to her just like losing a brother. The remark seemed to open the door to a very important subject. From many little observations which had dropped from Jessie, I gathered that she looked to Sandcombe as her home. It was not unnatural that she should do so. Partly from her disposition, and partly from the way in which she had been treated, she really was a mere child still, leaning upon every one, and always thinking that she should be provided for without thought of her own. And at first I should have said that Sandcombe would be the best place for her, at least for the present; but that was under the idea that Mrs. Morris had left her enough to live upon. Now, with only two hundred pounds in the world, and perhaps not that, it was, I feared, necessary that she should look out for some situation in which she could work for herself. William, indeed, might make a compromise with his conscience, and think that he atoned for what was almost like taking possession of Jessie's little fortune, by giving her a home for some months; but I felt that the plan would be very objectionable, even if it were proposed for a permanence. Sandcombe could only be Jessie's home under certain circumstances. If I were to go away, she must go too; and if William were to die, we must both go. It would be nothing like a reparation, however good-natured it might appear. A wound made by injustice cannot be healed by kindness; and

I grew indignant as I thought that William could be fidgety about Jessie's exerting herself in a way which could not possibly be painful beyond the moment, whilst he was deliberately making up his mind to deprive her of at least half of the little she might call her own.

Jessie herself had no thoughts of the kind. She liked going for a drive; she liked anything, indeed, which made her feel like a lady having nothing to do but to enjoy herself. She was anxious that we should go over the down and through Dene in order to reach Longside; but I strongly objected to it. Not liking, however, to thwart her unnecessarily, I merely said that if we went round by Hatton we should have a longer drive; and this seemed to satisfy her, and she wrapped her cloak round her, and arranged her crape veil very becomingly, and leaned back at her ease in the pony chaise, as pretty a picture of a young girl as could be desired. It was very painful to have to break in upon the dream in which I felt she was indulging, and my heart beat fast as I said, whilst we were driving through the outskirts of Hatton, "Everything must seem sadly changed to you, Jessie, dear; but you will become more reconciled by and by."

"I shall try to be," she said, "and I ought to be, when every one is so kind to me. But I shall miss Mr. Roger terribly."

"We shall all miss him," I replied; "unless, indeed, it were possible for me to go back with him."

"To Canada? Oh, Ursie! — but what would Mr. Grant do without you?"

"I can't say; it is difficult sometimes to know where one's duty lies. If I were to go, Jessie, I should think a great deal about you, and long to hear how you were getting on. I suppose there are not any of Mr. Morris's friends who would take care of you for a time, until something turns up which might suit you?"

The poor child sat quite silent. I believe she did not thoroughly understand my meaning, though my words sounded sad to her. I drove on slowly, till I saw her take out

her handkerchief and wipe her eyes, and then I said: "God will help you through it, dear Jessie, if you will only look to Him."

I had only just said the words when I heard the tramp of horses coming behind the chaise, and drew to one side to let them pass. "You have not driven very fast," called out Roger's cheerful voice. He was on his way to Mr. Stewart's and John Hervey was with him. Jessie kept her face averted, and I saw Roger look at her intently. I am sure he quite well knew she was crying. John Hervey came round to me at the other side, and spoke in rather a low voice, "They have heard again from Miss Milicent, Ursie."

"So far so good," I said.

"Yes, if she can stay with him; but it seems an odd kind of place he is in, — somewhere in the heart of Paris. She writes in good spirits enough, but I am afraid she is going to be taken in."

"It will be her own doing," I said. "What have you heard of Mrs. Weir lately?"

"Nothing, except that Mrs. Temple is on the lookout for some one who will neither eat, drink, nor sleep, — but read to Mrs. Weir all day, and sit up with her all night, for fifteen pounds a year. Now, Roger, we shall be late; good-bye;" and they both rode off.

I don't know what had passed between Jessie and Roger; but I saw that Jessie had put up her veil, and it was not drawn down again till we arrived at Longside.

Mrs. Kemp was in the front of the house, feeding some tame partridges, which the Farmer had taken a fancy to have, and they, and a number of young chickens and ducks, were gathered about her, making her so busy that she did not perceive when we came into the garden. Her welcome to Jessie was as hearty as I could expect, — though I could see in her manner just the suspicion which was all the unkindness she ever indulged in. Mary, she said, was full of work, for it was baking day, — but she would find time to have a little gossip with me; and, begging Jessie to wait in the parlour

for a few minutes, she took me with her to find Mary. We were no sooner, however, out of the room than I begged her to stay and have a little chat with me first; not that I did not wish to see Mary, but I had a good many little things to talk over with her.

"I don't know where to take you, my dear," she said, considering a moment: "my room has been scoured this morning, and the floor is damp; you'll take cold if you go there. But here's the Farmer's smoking room, do you mind going in?" The smoking room was very small, and near the kitchen. I believe the Farmer did smoke a pipe there occasionally, when there were persons in the house who disliked the smell of tobacco, but it was used for a lumber room besides.

"Now, sit down, my dear, and say your say; and Mrs. Kemp placed a chair for me, and sat down herself in the window seat. "We sha'n't be interrupted, and no one will guess where we are"

"But I must not leave Jessie too long," I said.

Mrs. Kemp looked up with some surprise. "Are you so very particular?"

"Not always; only just now, when she is in trouble."

"Well! yes, all right. But, my dear, what is she going to do with herself?"

"That is the question,—I don't know. William may ask her to stay with us." Mrs. Kemp looked very grave. "You don't approve," I said, and then, after a moment, added, "no more do I."

Her face brightened up. "I was afraid, my dear, you were going to burthen yourself with her."

"You don't like her," I exclaimed, and I almost regretted that Jessie's name had been mentioned.

"No, I don't like her, my dear. I had rather say that out at once, and then there's not likely to be so much prejudice in it. We are too near the Prices to like her; and it does not please me, Ursie, that you should have so much to do with her."

"I think — I am sure, indeed — that you believe her to be much more mixed up with the Prices than she really is," I began.

"Very likely, my dear; but, as the Farmer says, 'a man is known by his friends,' and I suppose it's the same case with a woman; and Mrs. Price's ways are just those which a modest, well-behaved girl would turn from. To see her drive by with her smart cloak and fly-away bonnet, and two or three idle men following, just as we are going off to church on a Sunday, is quite sufficient for me. Jessie Lee may be an angel by nature, yet when she goes to stay at Dene — I don't want to say anything unkind — but it seems to me that she puts herself in the way of being a fallen one."

I don't know when I had seen Mrs. Kemp so excited, and her old-fashioned notions of propriety were quite scandalized by the new customs of Dene. There was an exaggeration in her feeling against Jessie, but I had no time to spend in arguing her out of it, so I merely said: "Whatever Mrs. Price may be, it is quite clear that it is our business now to take charge of Jessie, and keep her out of harm's way."

"Yes, if you can; and for that end, my dear, you had better keep her out of Lieutenant Macdonald's way."

"There is no fear there," I said. 'She has refused him."

"Refused him! has she? Well that's more than I gave her credit for. Every one about here said that she had been warned about him, but that she was determined to have him."

"So you see she is good for something," I continued.

"Yes; something."

"A good deal, if she only had some one to advise and to love her."

"And is that to be you, my dear?" asked Mrs. Kemp, simply.

"No, I wish it could be but I don't think it is possible;" and in a few words I put before Mrs. Kemp what was Jessie's position; not, of course, mentioning anything about William and the legacy, but merely saying that the sum left her by Mrs. Morris was very small, and there might be claims upon

t, and that at any rate it would not support her by itself, hough it might keep her in clothes if she lived with us.

"Just as the Farmer thought," she exclaimed; "just what ie said to me only last night. 'I am afraid,' said he, 'that Jessie Lee is tied on to Ursie for life.'"

But I interrupted her. "Dear Mrs. Kemp," I said, "indeed the Farmer is mistaken; it is what I feel must not be; but how to prevent it is the difficulty. I don't think men like o do disagreeable things, and William won't put before her hat she can't stay with us, though he will be sure to complain f she does; and how I am to do it I don't know."

Mrs. Kemp pondered a little: "You must find something lse for her to do, my dear," she said.

"But I can't look about, and inquire behind her back, as it vere. She would think it so very unkind, if it came to her ears."

"That is true. Nothing is ever gained in this world by iot being straightforward."

"And then it comes into my mind sometimes whether it is necessary after all; whether she is not very much in the same ase that I was when I first came to Sandcombe."

"Only, Ursie, you always knew what you had to look to, and were set upon working for yourself," she replied.

"Yes, and Leah wanted me, and I can manage very well without Jessie. The only thing is, she is so little able to go alone."

"She has two legs of her own," said Mrs. Kemp.

I smiled as I answered, "Yes, but very weak ones."

"I doubt if you will help her, my dear, by adding a wooden one of yours," replied Mrs. Kemp.

"It may be better to go halting," I said, "than to tumble down."

"I never heard of any human creature yet that was able even to halt with three legs," replied Mrs. Kemp, laughing. "If you want to make Jessie Lee strong, my dear, it strikes me you must put her in a position in which she will feel that she has no legs but her own to depend upon, and then she will learn how to use them."

"And if she should never learn, and get into mischief," I said anxiously.

"You can't think, surely, that you will be responsible," replied Mrs. Kemp. "We are bound to help others to walk in the right way, and God knows how much we may have to answer for in not doing it; but I don't see that we are bound to break our backs by carrying them, for fear they should wander into the wrong; and I suppose, Ursie, that if we do, the chances are that we shall all fall to the ground together."

"I was afraid," I said, "that I might be deciding hardly, and I wanted another opinion. I believe I wish her to be independent, and so I am the more afraid of my own reasons."

"As the Farmer says: two and two make four, whether we wish it or not," replied Mrs. Kemp, "and we need not be afraid to own it. In Leah's day, Ursie, things would have been different, no doubt. She was a married woman, and had a home of her own, and Jessie was all but brought up by her, and it would have been her duty, no doubt, to find a place for her cousin by her own fireside, especially as she had no children. But you are not Leah, my dear, and you have no house of your own yet, though I hope some day you will have, — and moreover, you are but a young girl, having enough to do to look after yourself. Don't you see, that to take upon yourself to be answerable for Jessie is putting upon your conscience what God never intended should be there. I should say, try and find out something which may be good for her to do, and in the meantime keep her at Sandcombe, and teach her all the sensible things you can. I can't but think, you will do more for her by far in that way, than by tying her on to your apron strings, and fancying she is going right, because she has not the opportunity of doing anything else."

"I tried to open the subject this morning," I said, "but it was difficult."

"I wish you could put something before her which she might like to undertake," said Mrs. Kemp. "The Farmer sometimes tells me, that the quickest way of pulling down old notions is, by building up new ones. It is the plan he has

gone upon in bringing folks to his way of thinking, about improving the cottages. He might have talked to them for the hour, and he would not have persuaded them; but when they saw what he was doing himself, they came round quite naturally. And so, Ursie, my dear, it may be the same with Jessie, if you want her to put aside the notions she has been accustomed to of late, and take to others."

A sudden thought struck me. "I did hear of something," I said, "as I was coming here, but it would not do; no, it could not."

"Think again, my dear. My mother used to declare, that there was a 'lion in her path,' whenever a new notion was proposed to her. Perhaps there is one in yours."

"Mrs. Temple is the lion," I said laughing. "If it were not for her the plan might do. She wants some one to look after Mrs. Weir, and read to her, and nurse her. Jessie might suit well enough for that, for she has very gentle ways, and I think Mrs. Weir would be fond of her; but then I know that a good deal would be put upon her. I dare say, in fact, she would be made to do a great deal of work besides; I should scarcely like to propose it."

"No; and yet it would be close at hand, and you could have your eye upon her. It would be worth inquiring about; there might be worse plans."

That was very true, but I did not take at all kindly to the suggestion. Mrs. Kemp urged me a little more. She thought I still had a lurking wish to keep Jessie at Sandcombe; but she was quite mistaken there. I was only glad to have another opinion to support that which I had formed myself. We had been talking longer than I had intended, and I was afraid I should have but little time left for Mary; so I proposed to go to her, and Mrs. Kemp agreed, adding, "It seems to me, Ursie, that you may just as well make use of this notion about Stonecliff to sound Jessie, and see what she thinks of doing, even if it should come to nothing."

The idea was a good one, and yet I was so perverse that it made me feel almost cross. The fact was, I believe, that I

did not like the thought of Jessie's filling the place which had once been partly marked out for myself. I would not have gone to Stonecliff on any account, even for the prospects of waiting upon Mrs. Weir; but it did not please me that Jessie should go. I could better have borne to see a stranger there. Persons are very fortunate whose tempers are not perverse,—mine always was so. As in looking through a telescope, I generally had to make two or three twists with my mind before I could see things rightly.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Events followed each other quickly about that time. It was not more than ten days after the drive to Longside, that William was off to London to consult an oculist. Farmer Kemp and Roger were frightened about him, and they frightened me too; and between us we persuaded him, though not without much difficulty, to go. What chiefly alarmed us was the fact, that my father's sight had been very bad before his death; and it was said that if he had lived he would almost certainly have been blind. Something of the same tendency, we feared, might be inherited by William. A cold would scarcely have produced such consequences, if there was not some predisposition beforehand; and William was so extremely careless about himself, that we had no hope of his adopting even ordinary remedies, unless he was put under strict discipline. He was extremely unhappy, and beyond measure fidgety, when he was ill; but for all that, he would never do what he was told in order to get better.

As it happened, he could not have gone at a better time, since Roger was at hand to attend to things in his absence; and we were satisfied as to his comfort when away, for he was to be at a house belonging to Mrs. Mason, formerly of Dene. She had within the last year given up being housekeeper, and taken to let lodgings. I knew she would look after him; but I made him promise that if any operation was to be performed,

or if he should be at all ill, I was to be sent for immediately. Oh, that promise! though I urged it earnestly, it fell upon my heart like lead, for I knew that God was binding me to William by ties of duty and kindness which it would be sin to break.

The effect of William's departure was to bring me to a positive decision in my own mind as to Jessie. If I should be called to London she could not stay at Sandcombe. This seemed the simplest and easiest way of putting the case before her; and I was most thankful for it; for up to this time we had been so occupied with William, and so anxious about him, and indeed Jessie had made herself so useful in reading to him and writing for him, that I do not know what I should have done without her. I had heard, again, of Mrs. Temple's plan of a kind of companion for Mrs. Weir, from Mrs. Richardson, who kindly came over to see us when she knew of William's trouble, and I found, as I had expected, that the new person was to take the place of Cotton, and only to have a girl besides to help her. I could not help fearing that Cotton might have got into disgrace by admitting me to Stonecliff; or perhaps by some incautious complaints; but it was useless to vex myself about it, for I was quite tied to Sandcombe, and could not possibly have found time to walk over and inquire about it. I felt for poor Mrs. Weir very much, as I knew that Cotton would prove a loss that it would be almost impossible to replace.

The day that Mrs. Richardson called, which was two days before William went, I mentioned Jessie to her, and asked if she thought it likely she would do for the situation. Her youth seemed the great objection, but it was not a very serious one, as there were elderly servants in the house, and Mrs. Richardson seemed glad of the idea; but I begged her not to say anything about it, for I felt in my own mind that I had a hard task before me in bringing Jessie even to think of it.

My hope was that I should have Roger to support me. His common sense, I thought, would make him see the necessity

of the case directly, and I introduced the subject the very day William left us. It was after dinner, and Jessie was gone out of the room, and I knew she was likely to be busy for half an hour or more, so I began: "Jessie looks much better; don't you think so?"

"Yes; quite a different person. It is your company which has done her good, Trot."

"Time and occupation, rather," I said. "She has not much of my company; and if I am called to London she will have less of it: we must make haste and find something to suit her before that."

I saw that the notion had struck Roger for the first time.

"I thought she was going to live here," he said, quickly.

"No; who dreamed of such a thing?" I exclaimed. "Not William, I am sure."

"He never said anything to the contrary."

"Because it is not his way to take business upon himself which does not belong to him. He knew that I should be on the look out for something for Jessie."

"And have you found any thing?" inquired Roger.

"I have heard of something," I said. "Mrs. Weir wants a person to read to her, and look after her, half a companion and half a lady's-maid. What do you say? Will it do?"

"I am no judge," he replied, and he took up his hat, which was on the table, and left the room.

That evening, before we separated, and as Jessie was busying herself in putting away some of the supper-things, Roger said: "Jessie, has Ursie been talking to you at all about her plans for you?"

I can't say how surprised I felt at his beginning in this sudden way. I answered for her quickly; "There is no hurry; we need not talk about it to-night."

Jessie looked from one to the other.

"It will be no such great evil, I trust," continued Roger; and he made a movement, as though he would have gone up to her, but he stopped: "If Ursie is obliged to go to London,—"

"I can go to Mrs. Price," exclaimed Jessie, whilst her eyes sparkled with pleasure. "She said he would be delighted to have me."

I glanced at Roger, — he looked pained, not angry, — and did not answer.

"I am afraid that won't do, dear Jessie," I said, as kindly as I possibly could, whilst feeling more cross with her than I should like to acknowledge. "What you will want will be some place where you can make a little something for yourself; and fond as Mrs. Price may be of you, I suppose she is not likely to pay you for staying with her." The colour mounted to Jessie's cheeks: "You mean I have to provide for myself," she said, proudly.

"Every one is better for being independent, dear Jessie," I said, "and you know you have been accustomed to work all your life."

"Amongst my friends," she replied. "It is a very different thing going amongst strangers." She looked towards Roger, as though craving his support. He was leaning over a chair, moving it backwards and forwards, but his countenance was imperturbable.

There was a momentary pause, and Jessie sat down and the tears came fast; I saw him start then, but he controlled himself, and left it to me to soothe her. I put before her everything which I thought could calm or elevate her mind. I told her that I could understand all her feelings; that I did not know how soon I might not be obliged to do the same myself, and I urged her to be brave, and face the trial with a trusting heart, knowing that God who had sent it, would enable her to bear it. But the only answer I obtained was, "It is not the same, Ursie. You have a home and relations; I am an orphan, and have no home."

I had nothing to reply, and my heart reproached me for cruelty. Roger came to my assistance. "Jessie," he said, "it is quite true that you are an orphan, and have no home, but God has given you true friends, who won't forsake you. Whilst William, and Ursie, and I live, wherever we may be,

you may always count upon us, and you won't vex us now, I am sure, by putting yourself against what comes in the way of God's ordering."

Still the tears fell, and at last Roger pushed aside the chair, and going up to her, took one of her hands in both his, and said, "You can't think we don't care for you, Jessie."

The tone of his voice must have touched her, for she gave him one of her sweetest smiles; he still kept hold of her hand, till something seemed to strike him; and he let it drop suddenly, and turning to me, said, "Tell her what you have heard of."

"Not now," I replied, "not till she wants to know; we need not press it upon her."

But Jessie looked up at me, and said: "Yes, now. I may as well know the worst."

"It might not be so very disagreeable," I said, "if you were to be companion to Mrs. Weir, and read to her, and look after her while Miss Milicent is away. You would be sure to love her." Even in the midst of my worry I could have smiled at the change in Jessie's face. It brightened in a way that was quite marvellous, as with all the eagerness of a child, she exclaimed: "Read to Mrs. Weir! well! I should like that. I thought I was to scrub floors! Is it settled?"

"Only talked about," I replied. "We wanted your consent first: but you will find some disagreeables, Jessie; you must think well about it."

"Thought won't make much difference, where there is such a brave spirit," said Roger. "Jessie is fit to face the world, I see."

"She is fit for bed now," I observed; "you look quite tired, dear Jessie. Just take your candle and go, and we will say all there is to say to-morrow, only think by yourself whether you could bear the kind of life." Roger lighted her candle, yet she lingered, asking me questions, some of which I answered, but she teased me with others, though very good humouredly. It must have been nearly ten minutes before I could persuade her that I was in earnest, and did not mean to

stay and talk any more to her. It would have been useless to do so, she was in such a childish mood, the question of chief importance being whether Mrs. Weir liked story books.

"There are not many girls of her age who would bear a reverse of fortune like that," said Roger, when Jessie left the room. It would have seemed unkind in me to differ, so I said nothing.

Roger took up the plan for Jessie's going to Mrs. Weir with his usual quiet energy and good sense. He made me talk it over again with Mrs. Kemp, and suggested what I doubt if I should have thought of myself, that she should be the person to arrange the business with Mrs. Temple, so that no jealousy might be excited, and that Mrs. Kemp might, in a manner, be considered as Jessie's adviser and friend. He did an excellent deed in this. Both Mrs. Kemp and the Farmer had gained for themselves a character in the neighbourhood, which even Mrs. Temple was obliged to acknowledge, and better terms were made for Jessie through their means than could ever have been obtained by me. So kind it was of Mrs. Kemp to take up the matter as she did! but she was one of those who never let a prejudice stand in the way of a duty.

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no one else who knew anything about them, were only mist and vapour, except as regarded the need of money. John knew that, because ever since the crash of Mr. Weir's affairs, he had himself been employed to collect Mrs. Weir's rents, and do little matters of business for her, which if they had been put into the hands of a lawyer would have run away with a good deal of money. As far, he told me, as he could gather from the few words which dropped occasionally from Mrs. Temple when they met on business, Mr. Weir was speculating again, and Miss Milicent was entering into his concerns and encouraging him. They had removed to better lodgings, and upon the whole Miss Milicent seemed to be rather enjoying herself than not, and there was no talk of her returning home.

Every one, I suppose, has had experience of that kind of transition, that expectant state, in which we were at this time living at Sandcombe; feeling that changes must come before long, and finding ourselves, indeed, advancing surely towards them, yet so slowly that the progress from day to day was scarcely perceptible. Jessie's going to Stonecliff, indeed, broke in upon the routine of our lives; but even that came in a way which did not much disturb me. I had really nothing to do with it, for I had not ventured to go over to speak to Mrs. Weir about her, lest I might do mischief. She walked over to Stonecliff one afternoon, and Roger and I with her. There were no solemn leave-takings, or fears, or warnings. Jessie took her new life as she might have done the idea of a visit to Dene; and there was something which roused all our kindlier feelings of interest in the simple way in which she trusted that every one would be kind to her, and that she should be very happy, and free, and allowed to come over and see us from Stonecliff just as she used to do from Hatton. I could not damp her by assuring her that it would not be so. If she made friends with Mrs. Temple it might be so. All I could say was, that the only way to find pleasure in any life, is to set one's heart upon its duties, and so I begged her to turn her whole mind to the wish of making Mrs. Weir comfortable.

I was sorry to part from her, and yet more happy than I can say, to be at last quite alone with Roger. When we said good-bye to Jessie on the top of the hill above Stonecliff, and I put my arm within his, and we walked together over the down, as in the old times, and I knew that we were probably to have that evening and many others to ourselves, without interruption, I felt a peace at my heart which seemed very near to what we hope to enjoy in Heaven.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

I MAY pass over many weeks. It was summer, and Roger was with us still, detained partly by lawyer's business, partly on account of William's infirmity, which was become very serious. Sandcombe was cheerful with haymaking, and the prospect of a good harvest, and I was busy working hard, but willingly, myself, and leading others to do the same.

Since Jessie went away, Esther Smithson had been regularly hired, and another school girl was in training, so that there was no over work. William would not yet give up looking after everything or pretending to do so; and he stood in the way of many of my little plans of improvement; yet I managed to carry out several, and I was hopeful about more. Now that Roger was at home, the men were regular at church; and any cases of bad conduct in the week were immediately noticed. The boys also were kept more apart from the men, and encouraged by a kind word from Roger to attend to good habits. We could not yet rival Longside in the respectability of our labourers, but we were advancing towards it. Roger still worked at William about the old question of the improvement of the cottages, and advanced so far as to obtain a promise that when his eyes were better he would see about them. A very vague promise to me, and I suspect to Roger also. All that I could do in the mean time, was to see some of the cottagers' wives myself, and try to put them in the way of managing better with the little space they had. They were

inclined to think me very interfering at first, but Sandcombe was a place to which they looked for help when they were ill, or out of work, and so they did not like quite to neglect my instructions. Upon the whole, my life at that time was very bright, more so indeed inwardly than outwardly, for there was a hope dawning upon it which I could not willingly allow myself to perceive, because it came through another's trial.

With regard to Jessie, the accounts were as pleasant as we had any reason to expect. Mrs. Weir liked her, and Mrs. Temple put up with her. This was the best I had anticipated, but I don't think it satisfied Roger. What he may have pictured to himself for her, I don't know, but he thought the place a hard one; and I could not persuade him that any place would be hard to a poor child like Jessie, sent into the world for the first time to provide for herself. He worried himself about it so much at times, that I was quite glad he had not more opportunities of seeing her. The time when we generally had her with us was on a Sunday afternoon, about once in three weeks. Mrs. Weir was very particular as to her going to church, and now and then she was allowed to walk home with us and drink tea; in fact, it was part of the agreement made for her by Mrs. Kemp. These were the occasions when we had an outbreak of complaints.

"It won't do, Ursie," said Roger, coming to me one Sunday, just as I was getting tea ready, and when Jessie was gone upstairs. "It's worse than the slaves."

"What has Jessie been telling you now?" I asked; for they had been walking home part of the way together, whilst I stayed behind to say a few words to Mary Kemp. "I don't wonder at her not being able to bear it," he continued. "English people were never made to put up with spies."

I laughed a little — "Oh!" I said, "I know what you are talking about; — Mrs. Temple's way of finding out everything which goes on in the house. It is very odious, I confess; but Jessie is not likely to have much to betray; and so Mrs. Temple will, one must hope, be tired of it before long."

Just then Jessie came in. Roger placed a chair for her

next me. "I have been telling, Ursie," he said, "what you were telling me just now. It is too bad."

Jessie's colour rose. "Oh, it is nothing," she said, "nothing to signify. Ursie won't think it of consequence."

"Indeed I shall, Jessie," I said, "if there is anything unfair in it, or unlike what a lady should do."

"One can't have one's things to oneself," said Jessie; "but I suppose a girl like me has no right to expect it." The tears were in her eyes in an instant.

"Mrs. Temple likes to know everything that goes on, I am aware," I said.

"But she need not let her servants pry into letters, and ask impertinent questions," said Roger.

"What is the grievance, Jessie?" I said; "I don't quite understand." Jessie, I saw, was unwilling to answer; she moved to let William pass, — for he was just come in to tea, — and made a little fuss with him, wishing, I could not help thinking, to change the subject.

I did not like to press her any further, and some trifling remarks were made which led at last to an observation about Dene. Lieutenant Macdonald's name was accidentally mentioned, Jessie's cheeks were crimson instantly. Whether there was any thing in it more than her trick of blushing and being conscious, I could not tell; but I disliked seeing it. By this time she ought at least to have been able to hear Mr. Macdonald's name with indifference. I suppose I must have been led into a train of thought upon the subject, or in some way shown by my manner that I was not quite comfortable, for Roger called me aside after tea, and said: "Ursie, you shouldn't be hard upon little Jessie; she wants some one to sympathise with her."

I quite started. "Sympathise!" I exclaimed. "I do sympathise to the utmost. No one can know better than I do how hateful it is to live in the same house with Mrs. Temple. But Jessie didn't tell me what the particulars of the present trouble were."

"You didn't ask," he said; "and she is so quick in her

feelings, she will never come out to you if you don't encourage her."

"Really, Roger," I said, "I can scarcely think Jessie requires encouragement to come out, as you call it, to me, when we have been together, like relations, from childhood."

"Relations are just the very persons to whom it is often most difficult to talk," he said, "and, besides, Jessie looks up to you, and thinks, naturally enough, that you will expect of her the same kind of endurance which you can practise yourself."

"I can't say much for my endurance," I said, laughing. "I know I used to go into my room, at the Heath, and bolt the door, and walk up and down, storming against Mrs. Temple. There wasn't much endurance in that, I am afraid; but it won't exactly do, Roger, to say this to Jessie. You know she has been a little spoilt, and always makes the most of her troubles. I don't mean, of course, that I won't try and give her all the sympathy that is reasonable."

"The question is what is reasonable?" said Roger.

"Well! tell me what the case is, and then perhaps I can judge."

"I shall leave Jessie to explain for herself," he replied. "Stories always lose their point coming secondhand."

He was a little odd in his manner; and I am sure he knew it, for after he had left the room, he came back again and kissed me, and said: "one can't expect all the world to be as wise as you, my little Trot."

I went to Jessie directly, for I felt that perhaps I had been a little wanting in tenderness. She was in my room, crying, and that alone would have made me feel gently towards her, if I had been inclined to be otherwise, which I certainly was not. All I longed to know was that she was not in any way encouraging thoughts of Lieutenant Macdonald. I could not be gentle on that point, it would have been wrong.

In reply to my questions, however, I could gain only very unsatisfactory answers. The principal grievance resolved itself into the fact that she had one day found the housemaid

spying into her drawers, and that Mrs. Temple had been told that she received a great many letters, which Jessie declared to be false. Since then, she said, she had never received a letter without the post-mark being examined, and hints given as to where it came from.

"Very disagreeable, Jessie," I said, "but you can't have correspondents enough to make it signify, and if you don't show that you care, the servants will soon leave off troubling you. Nothing stops people's teasing so soon as being indifferent to it."

I don't think Jessie was satisfied. Either she felt herself more of a martyr than she could bring me to acknowledge, or there was some deeper cause of annoyance than I knew of.

She seemed once as though she was upon the point of telling me something more, but hearing Roger call out to her to put on her things quickly or she would be late, she turned away, saying, "There is no time now, I will talk of it another day."

I urged the present moment, but the wish, whatever it was, had left her. She went on talking upon other subjects all the time she was preparing to go, and I gained more insight into her present life in those few minutes than in the whole two hours before.

She was very fond of Mrs. Weir; who, indeed would not have been? and I hoped that the good lady's earnestness was having some effect upon her. Jessie said she read the Bible to her every day, and some other books which Mrs. Temple provided. Mrs. Weir had asked once for a story-book which she had heard of, but it had never been forthcoming, and the history books which Mrs. Temple recommended made Mrs. Weir's head ache, so there was not much variety in the reading; but Jessie had her time fully employed in other ways. She did all the needle-work which Mrs. Weir required, and some for Mrs. Temple besides. That, she said, was the most disagreeable part of her business. Mrs. Temple was so very particular, and did not care how many times she had a dress altered. Jessie had heard some talk of Mrs. Temple's maid

leaving, and she was afraid, she said, that it might be proposed to her to take the place, besides waiting on Mrs. Weir.

"Impossible!" I observed. "We couldn't hear of such a thing, Jessie; you mustn't think of it."

"I don't, you may depend upon that," she replied. "I said to the cook, when she told me it had been suggested, that I should leave at once if it was at all insisted upon. Why, Ursie, a girl might well have two days in one to get through all her work if she has to wait upon Mrs. Temple. She sits before the glass, when she is dressing, fidgeting with her hair, and her maid standing behind her, just as though there was nothing else in the world to be thought of but that she should look her best, and the morning is gone before one has time to look round. I will do any thing in the world for Mrs. Weir; but I would rather fifty times over scrub the floor than attend upon Mrs. Temple."

"You must keep your own ground, Jessie," I said. "It is the only way with Mrs. Temple. But take care to be respectful to her."

"I am that, I think," said Jessie, "and the servants tell me I am a favourite; but it is not home, Ursie."

That was the root of the matter! and I don't think there was any want of affection in my manner then, as I tried to console her, telling her that Sandcombe was a home whilst I was in it, and that God would never leave her without one if I were removed from it. The way in which she listened to me made me feel what Mrs. Weir was doing for her, leading her to the right comfort, and showing her by example that religion is a dress to be worn every day, and not kept for Sunday. It was the one thing Jessie needed to give her strength, — and how charming she would be if she had it! only I wished I could be quite sure that nothing was kept back from me. Roger, like me, noticed Mrs. Weir's influence. He and I went with Jessie half across the down and we talked about serious things, chiefly about a sermon upon trust which Mr. Richardson had preached that afternoon. His remark to me afterwards was, "A written sermon may be good, Ursie,

and a spoken one better; but an acted one is the best of all. Jessie has gained a whole year in thought and principle since she has been with Mrs. Weir."

I was not sure myself whether it was so much as a year, but time would show.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The Saturday after that I went into Hove for some shopping and marketing, and Mary Kemp with me. I stopped at Longside on my way back, and had a cup of tea, and sent the parcels home in the chaise, intending to walk myself. We expected the farmer and John Hervey to come in about the same time, and I hoped that Roger might make his appearance too, as he also had been into Hove; but finding they were late, I did not like to wait, and set out to walk home alone, leaving word for Roger that I meant to go through Dene. The Prices were, I knew, away, so I thought I might take their road, which shortened the way. I never ventured on such a liberty when they were at home, though there was in fact a right of way through the grounds for every one. The place was kept in good order, and as I had not seen the garden for some time, I asked the gardener if I might go in at one of the little gates of the shrubbery and walk round. The plantation, which I remembered as a collection of stunted shrubs, intersected with sandy walks, was now grown into a little copse of thick trees, pleasantly shading the house. Passing through it, I crossed the turf and went down to the lower pond that I might have a full view of the garden. The foliage of the trees was beautifully fresh and green; the flower beds on the sloping lawn were filled with roses; the turf was as smooth as on the day I first looked upon it, smooth as no other turf ever was in my eyes. There stood the low stone house with its bow windows, and trellised verandah sheltered on one side by the steep woody bank, in which was cut the rough flight of steps leading to my favourite seat; whilst behind rose the

darker mass of trees planted in the hollow of the down, and the stone column above them raising its head, as it were, to meet the white clouds which floated majestically across the summer sky. It was very lovely and intensely quiet. The fountains were not playing, so that there was not even the plash of water to break the stillness; and when the old clock over the stables struck six, it gave no impression of a disturbing sound, but only of a solemn voice bidding me mark and ponder upon the silence.

I took off my bonnet for coolness and sat down upon a bench to rest, for I was very tired. My thoughts carried me back to the days gone by when Dene was my home. They were thoughts that seemed to have no direct purpose. They might rather be called attempts at recollection, which were almost like a dream, there was so little connection in them. But they were very pleasant, even though some sadness mingled with them. I indulged them, not thinking how time was going on; so little conscious indeed of what was passing at the moment, that before I was aware of a footstep I felt two hands on my shoulders and a kiss on my forehead, and starting up saw Roger behind me.

"How could you frighten me so!" I exclaimed. "I did not know you were near."

"I thought it was the kindest way," he said. "It ought not to frighten you; I always came upon you so when you were a child."

"Only, I am not a child now," I replied, laughing, "and so I am not accustomed to be 'come upon.' Is it late? must we go?" and I stood up.

"Not yet," he said, "there is no hurry," and he threw himself on the grass at my feet. "It looks very pleasant, Trot."

"Very," I said, and I sighed, and sat down again.

"Very," he repeated — "but I would not go back to be as we were."

I was silent.

"I would not go back to be as we were," he repeated. "I would rather take the hope of what we may be."

stay and talk any more to her. It would have been useless to do so, she was in such a childish mood, the question of chief importance being whether Mrs. Weir liked story books.

"There are not many girls of her age who would bear a reverse of fortune like that," said Roger, when Jessie left the room. It would have seemed unkind in me to differ, so I said nothing.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

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"Mrs. Temple likes to know everything that goes on, I am aware," I said.

"But she need not let her servants pry into letters, and ask impertinent questions," said Roger.

"What is the grievance, Jessie?" I said; "I don't quite understand." Jessie, I saw, was unwilling to answer; she moved to let William pass, — for he was just come in to tea, — and made a little fuss with him, wishing, I could not help thinking, to change the subject.

I did not like to press her any further, and some trifling remarks were made which led at last to an observation about Dene. Lieutenant Macdonald's name was accidentally mentioned, Jessie's cheeks were crimson instantly. Whether there was any thing in it more than her trick of blushing and being conscious, I could not tell; but I disliked seeing it. By this time she ought at least to have been able to hear Mr. Macdonald's name with indifference. I suppose I must have been led into a train of thought upon the subject, or in some way shown by my manner that I was not quite comfortable, for Roger called me aside after tea, and said: "Ursie, you shouldn't be hard upon little Jessie; she wants some one to sympathise with her."

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feelings, she will never come out to you if you don't encourage her."

"Really, Roger," I said, "I can scarcely think Jessie requires encouragement to come out, as you call it, to me, when we have been together, like relations, from childhood."

"Relations are just the very persons to whom it is often most difficult to talk," he said, "and, besides, Jessie looks up to you, and thinks, naturally enough, that you will expect of her the same kind of endurance which you can practise yourself."

"I can't say much for my endurance," I said, laughing. "I know I used to go into my room, at the Heath, and bolt the door, and walk up and down, storming against Mrs. Temple. There wasn't much endurance in that, I am afraid; but it won't exactly do, Roger, to say this to Jessie. You know she has been a little spoilt, and always makes the most of her troubles. I don't mean, of course, that I won't try and give her all the sympathy that is reasonable."

"The question is what is reasonable?" said Roger.

"Well! tell me what the case is, and then perhaps I can judge."

"I shall leave Jessie to explain for herself," he replied. "Stories always lose their point coming secondhand."

He was a little odd in his manner; and I am sure he knew it, for after he had left the room, he came back again and kissed me, and said: "one can't expect all the world to be as wise as you, my little Trot."

I went to Jessie directly, for I felt that perhaps I had been a little wanting in tenderness. She was in my room, crying, and that alone would have made me feel gently towards her, if I had been inclined to be otherwise, which I certainly was not. All I longed to know was that she was not in any way encouraging thoughts of Lieutenant Macdonald. I could not be gentle on that point, it would have been wrong.

In reply to my questions, however, I could gain only very unsatisfactory answers. The principal grievance resolved itself into the fact that she had one day found the housemaid

spying into her drawers, and that Mrs. Temple had been told that she received a great many letters, which Jessie declared to be false. Since then, she said, she had never received a letter without the post-mark being examined, and hints given as to where it came from.

"Very disagreeable, Jessie," I said, "but you can't have correspondents enough to make it signify, and if you don't show that you care, the servants will soon leave off troubling you. Nothing stops people's teasing so soon as being indifferent to it."

I don't think Jessie was satisfied. Either she felt herself more of a martyr than she could bring me to acknowledge, or there was some deeper cause of annoyance than I knew of.

She seemed once as though she was upon the point of telling me something more, but hearing Roger call out to her to put on her things quickly or she would be late, she turned away, saying, "There is no time now, I will talk of it another day."

I urged the present moment, but the wish, whatever it was, had left her. She went on talking upon other subjects all the time she was preparing to go, and I gained more insight into her present life in those few minutes than in the whole two hours before.

She was very fond of Mrs. Weir; who, indeed would not have been? and I hoped that the good lady's earnestness was having some effect upon her. Jessie said she read the Bible to her every day, and some other books which Mrs. Temple provided. Mrs. Weir had asked once for a story-book which she had heard of, but it had never been forthcoming, and the history books which Mrs. Temple recommended made Mrs. Weir's head ache, so there was not much variety in the reading; but Jessie had her time fully employed in other ways. She did all the needle-work which Mrs. Weir required, and some for Mrs. Temple besides. That, she said, was the most disagreeable part of her business. Mrs. Temple was so very particular, and did not care how many times she had a dress altered. *Jessie had* heard some talk of Mrs. Temple's maid

leaving, and she was afraid, she said, that it might be proposed to her to take the place, besides waiting on Mrs. Weir.

"Impossible!" I observed. "We couldn't hear of such a thing, Jessie; you mustn't think of it."

"I don't, you may depend upon that," she replied. "I said to the cook, when she told me it had been suggested, that I should leave at once if it was at all insisted upon. Why, Ursie, a girl might well have two days in one to get through all her work if she has to wait upon Mrs. Temple. She sits before the glass, when she is dressing, fidgeting with her hair, and her maid standing behind her, just as though there was nothing else in the world to be thought of but that she should look her best, and the morning is gone before one has time to look round. I will do any thing in the world for Mrs. Weir; but I would rather fifty times over scrub the floor than attend upon Mrs. Temple."

"You must keep your own ground, Jessie," I said. "It is the only way with Mrs. Temple. But take care to be respectful to her."

"I am that, I think," said Jessie, "and the servants tell me I am a favourite; but it is not home, Ursie."

That was the root of the matter! and I don't think there was any want of affection in my manner then, as I tried to console her, telling her that Sandcombe was a home whilst I was in it, and that God would never leave her without one if I were removed from it. The way in which she listened to me made me feel what Mrs. Weir was doing for her, leading her to the right comfort, and showing her by example that religion is a dress to be worn every day, and not kept for Sunday. It was the one thing Jessie needed to give her strength, — and how charming she would be if she had it! only I wished I could be quite sure that nothing was kept back from me. Roger, like me, noticed Mrs. Weir's influence. He and I went with Jessie half across the down and we talked about serious things, chiefly about a sermon upon trust which Mr. Richardson had preached that afternoon. His remark to me afterwards was, "A written sermon may be good, Ursie,

and a spoken one better; but an acted one is the best of all. Jessie has gained a whole year in thought and principle since she has been with Mrs. Weir."

I was not sure myself whether it was so much as a year, but time would show.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The Saturday after that I went into Hove for some shopping and marketing, and Mary Kemp with me. I stopped at Longside on my way back, and had a cup of tea, and sent the parcels home in the chaise, intending to walk myself. We expected the farmer and John Hervey to come in about the same time, and I hoped that Roger might make his appearance too, as he also had been into Hove; but finding they were late, I did not like to wait, and set out to walk home alone, leaving word for Roger that I meant to go through Dene. The Prices were, I knew, away, so I thought I might take their road, which shortened the way. I never ventured on such a liberty when they were at home, though there was in fact a right of way through the grounds for every one. The place was kept in good order, and as I had not seen the garden for some time, I asked the gardener if I might go in at one of the little gates of the shrubbery and walk round. The plantation, which I remembered as a collection of stunted shrubs, intersected with sandy walks, was now grown into a little copse of thick trees, pleasantly shading the house. Passing through it, I crossed the turf and went down to the lower pond that I might have a full view of the garden. The foliage of the trees was beautifully fresh and green; the flower beds on the sloping lawn were filled with roses; the turf was as smooth as on the day I first looked upon it, smooth as no other turf ever was in my eyes. There stood the low stone house with its bow windows, and trellised verandah sheltered on one side by the steep woody bank, in which was cut the rough flight of steps leading to my favourite seat; whilst behind rose the

darker mass of trees planted in the hollow of the down, and the stone column above them raising its head, as it were, to meet the white clouds which floated majestically across the summer sky. It was very lovely and intensely quiet. The fountains were not playing, so that there was not even the plash of water to break the stillness; and when the old clock over the stables struck six, it gave no impression of a disturbing sound, but only of a solemn voice bidding me mark and ponder upon the silence.

I took off my bonnet for coolness and sat down upon a bench to rest, for I was very tired. My thoughts carried me back to the days gone by when Dene was my home. They were thoughts that seemed to have no direct purpose. They might rather be called attempts at recollection, which were almost like a dream, there was so little connection in them. But they were very pleasant, even though some sadness mingled with them. I indulged them, not thinking how time was going on; so little conscious indeed of what was passing at the moment, that before I was aware of a footstep I felt two hands on my shoulders and a kiss on my forehead, and starting up saw Roger behind me.

"How could you frighten me so!" I exclaimed. "I did not know you were near."

"I thought it was the kindest way," he said. "It ought not to frighten you; I always came upon you so when you were a child."

"Only, I am not a child now," I replied, laughing, "and so I am not accustomed to be 'come upon.' Is it late? must we go?" and I stood up.

"Not yet," he said, "there is no hurry," and he threw himself on the grass at my feet. "It looks very pleasant, Trot."

"Very," I said, and I sighed, and sat down again.

"Very," he repeated — "but I would not go back to be as we were."

I was silent.

"*I would* not go back to be as we were," he repeated. "I *would rather take* the hope of what we may be."

"Oh! Roger," I exclaimed, "never. If a home in Canada were paradise, it could never be to us like Dene; and you know —"

"What do I know?" he said, and half a smile curled his lips.

I looked him full in the face, and then I brought out the words: — "You know I can never be with you."

"Are you so sure of that, my little Trot?" he said.

He did not change countenance in the least, except that the curling smile seemed to spread so that he could with difficulty repress it.

"Sure, because of William's condition," I replied. "I did think at one time that perhaps he would marry again, and so I should be set free, but I see no prospect of it now."

"Neither do I," was Roger's reply.

"Then I must stay," I said. "I could not leave him."

"No, surely."

"And I can never live with you," I exclaimed. "Oh! Roger, can you bear it so quietly?"

He was silent.

"Can you bear it so quietly?" I repeated, and I felt the choking grief rise in my throat.

"Suppose I stay too," he said. He turned round and looked at me earnestly.

I could not speak; I was afraid to misunderstand him.

He went on hurriedly: — "We might do very well together, and it might be better in many ways, and we need not leave Sandcombe. We might be very happy; you and I, Trot, and" — he hesitated.

I started back, as I was about to fling my arms round his neck; for I heard the words — "Jessie Lee, if she will have me."

I have tried to exercise self-control on many occasions. I never struggled so hard as at that moment.

In a calm, forced, yet gentle tone, at least I think it was gentle, I said: — "Roger, dear, when did that thought come into your mind?"

He leaned his head upon his hands, as he answered — "From her childhood, I believe, — but I don't know, don't ask me, Ursie. It might have been better that I had never seen her."

The impulse I felt to speak out my thoughts was checked. It was no dawning love, that I could battle with it. It was a deep-seated affection, and I must accept it. My heart was crushed with a pressure which few could understand, but I said, as I passed my hand fondly over his head: — "If she will make you happy, no one will wish that you had never seen her."

"You don't like it," he exclaimed, and he rose up.

"I can't say; talk of yourself," I replied. "Had we not better go home?"

"There is no hurry. Surely you can spare me five minutes, Ursie."

Instead of answering him I walked on. He followed me. We said nothing for several minutes, at length Roger spoke again.

"I don't know why I have mentioned it to you, except that I can't keep anything from you. It may all come to nothing. I have no reason to think she cares for me: perhaps," and he paused, "perhaps the reverse. I thought I would ask you first, for you would know."

"Do you mean whether she loves any one else?" I said.

"Yes, she might, and I am so much older, — like her father, — she may be afraid of me."

"Dear Roger," I said, "those are questions which no one ought to answer but Jessie herself. If I were to give you my opinion twenty times over, you would not take it. No, is never no, unless it is said by the right person."

"And you won't give me hope?" he said.

"I will give you neither hope nor fear. If, upon due consideration," and I know that I stressed the words, "you think that Jessie Lee is the woman above all others, likely to make you a good, useful, sensible wife, then go and ask

her yourself; you are your own master, and she is her own mistress."

I felt quite sure that I had pained him, and my heart reproached me for my tone.

"You can't understand, Ursie," he said, after a pause; and a dagger's thrust could not have given me the anguish of those few words.

"I can; yes, — I can, indeed," I exclaimed, — and I spoke truth; for a dawn of light had broken upon me. "It is you, Roger, — but don't let us talk about that; — you know how I love you, — only be happy."

He repeated the word happy in a doubtful tone adding, "One can't be happy in suspense —"

We were then on the top of the down. Roger stopped irresolute. I saw what was in his thoughts. He looked towards Compton. "Are you going that way?" I said. I turned in the other direction, but he delayed me. "Ursie, I can't bear this; you must stay and listen to me. God knows how I have fought with myself, and He knows also how I have thought of you."

We sat down upon the heather, and I prayed that I might bear what was coming. He continued: "I told you that I had loved Jessie from a child; but I never deceived you. I did not know it, — and you have been dearest always; — you are dearest, now, in your own way. The two affections cannot interfere. You will not lose a brother, you will only gain a sister."

"Please, Roger dear," I said, "if you will only not think of me. It is all right, — quite right; but I was not prepared. I wish only to see you happy."

"That does not satisfy me," he replied. "I don't care for my own happiness. If I could feel that I was injuring you, Trot, I would give up my hope at this moment, though with it I should give up all that makes life dear; and it has not been till to-day that I have felt I could think of myself without injustice to you."

"Oh! Roger," I said, and the tears which I had so long

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"Oh! Roger," I said, and the tears which I had so long

been striving to retain, burst forth against my will; "injustice is such a cold, cold word."

"But I must use it," he said. "It has been in my mind always, that if I did marry, it should not be selfishly. You were my first claim, Ursie, and if I could not have formed a new home without turning you out of the old one, I would have lived and died unmarried."

"That would have been little kindness to me," I said, — "to make me feel that I stood in the way of your happiness."

"But you should not have felt it," he replied. "I could have crushed my love, and I would have done so, through God's help, and you should never have known it."

"You think little of a woman's penetration," I said.

"But I have done it," he replied. "If I had been obliged to return to Canada, neither you nor Jessie would ever have known what was in my heart."

"Not Jessie!" I exclaimed.

"No, not Jessie; the climate would have killed her. I knew it, for I asked the question of the doctor at Compton. And, Ursie, it would have cost her no pang. She would have married another, without any thought of me. She may do so now."

The tone in which he spoke was inexpressibly sad and anxious. I could but answer, though my voice seemed to fail me, "Roger, she must love you, you will be happy."

A brilliant smile passed over his face. "My precious little Trot, always my comforter. But I want to speak more of you now, to tell you how things have come about. William and I talked over business matters this morning. He knows his own state now, he is not fit to manage the farm, and he wishes me to take it from him. That might be better than Canada, Ursie. He will have his home with us still; we shall be together, as we were for those few happy weeks, when Jessie was staying with us. And William sees things rightly as regards you, Ursie. He knows that he must make a provision for you, and he is willing to do so, now that he has no other claim. You will be no loser."

I tried to stop him, but he continued: "I must say it, because it has been a chief thought with me. To leave you to the chance of struggling on in the world, as best you might, after all we have been to each other, would bring a curse upon me. I couldn't do it, even though it were to save Jessie from a life like it. I knew that I must see you out of the mire before I thought of myself, and now God has opened the way to carry out my wish. Oh! Ursie, can't you say to me that you think His blessing will be on it?"

I pressed his hand, — no words would come.

"She is not what you expected for me, I know," he said, answering what he felt to be in my mind. "But, Ursie, I could not love a grave, staid woman of my own age."

"No," I replied, "I am aware of that. I feel what you want, Roger; but, — let me say it now, for I may never do so again, — are you sure that you know Jessie?"

"I have seen her," he exclaimed, "in times of trial: I have watched her through Mrs. Morris's illness, and when she was with us; and now, troubled as she is by her life at Stonecliff. Whatever she may have been as a child, Ursie, sorrow has, through God's grace, made her a noble woman."

I could not tell him the depth of my fear that the change as yet was not to be relied upon for a continuance. I had even then learnt that it is no part of true wisdom to endeavour to give our own impression, to the disparagement of any individual, when the person with whom we are conversing, and from whom we differ, has the same facts as ourselves from which to judge. The unfavourable opinion has no effect except to excite a suspicion of prejudice, and the words hastily spoken leave behind them wounds which perhaps will never be healed. What I said of Jessie at that moment might influence the whole of our future lives.

Roger waited for me to reply; but, instead of doing so, I kissed him once more tenderly, and whispered: "God guide you to what is best; I can't, Roger," and turned away.

And I was blind, senselessly blind! I had not seen, what was self-evident to the eyes of others; I was surprised at the

existence of feelings which I had myself been instrumental in no slight measure in bringing about!

I confess all; — I can only say for myself, in excuse, that others have done likewise. As in illness, so most frequently in love, the persons most deeply interested are the last to perceive the existence of danger.

But had I really any right to consider it danger? When I rushed up to my own room, and poured out to Him who alone could comfort me, the bitter anguish of "the wounded spirit—which who can bear?" was I justified in my wretchedness? Let those fear to judge who have never been similarly tried.

Yet without doubt I was selfish and unreasonable in my love for Roger. I had found in him all I needed to satisfy my imagination, and my reverence; and my affection had indeed so engrossed me that I scarcely thought about other men except to feel that they were his inferiors. I may not be believed when I say this, but it is true. But in this overpowering feeling I forgot that I did not stand in the same relation to him. I filled the place which in God's Providence was intended to be second, and I thought it the first; because the first was vacant. The world saw it. Again and again I had been told that Roger would marry, but I clung to the image of my own love, reflected in his, and in my heart felt myself wiser than the world. This was the root of bitterness. If Jessie had been an angel of goodness I must still have been wretched for the time, for the foundation on which I had unconsciously built up my fabric of earthly happiness was undermined. But the circumstances of my trial were aggravated, as it appeared to me, a hundredfold by Roger's choice: Jessie was unworthy of him. She might be gentle, sweet tempered, winning in manner, anxious to act rightly, but she was essentially inferior to him, and Roger was blind in not perceiving it. I acknowledged his consideration, his generous thought for myself, his singular unselfishness. I longed to be grateful. I hoped I was so; but his weakness I could not forgive.

As we go on in life, we open our eyes to the facts of human

inconsistency, and, knowing that all are fallible, we cease to expect infallibility. But it is not so when we are young, and the first dawning upon the mind, of a failing in one whom we respect, is one of the most painful trials which at that age we can be called upon to bear. When I thought of Roger as deceived, deluded, caught by a sweet smile, and the expression of a passing wish to do right, which might never be carried into action, I felt as though I had no longer any judgment upon which to rest. He had erred in this case, the most important upon which a man can be called upon to decide, and he might err in others likewise. Even if Jessie were to refuse him, it would not comfort me. He had loved her — that was enough. The dreariness and disappointment which took possession of me I can never describe. As I sat down on a low seat by my bed-side, I felt deadened. Prayer, all powerful though it was, could not restore my dream of human perfection. I do not know how long I remained alone. It grew quite dark. I heard Martha moving about below, and William's voice called out for candles, and I ought to go down-stairs to him; but I made an excuse to myself because of my grief. I let him stay by himself, and fancied that I was excused from attending upon him. The moon rose slowly over the hill, and its cold light streamed in upon my room. I knew that Roger must soon return. I was sure he had been to Compton, and had seen Jessie; and I went to the window, which looked out upon the lane, and watched for his coming. I thought I could tell even by the way he walked whether his mission had been prosperous. I had not long to wait. A dark figure stood upon the brow of the hill, full in the moonlight. Never before had I seen Roger draw near without a thrill of untold love and delight; now, nervous and heartsick, I watched his footsteps, counting them as it were by the beatings of my heart, and scarcely able to restrain myself from rushing out to upbraid him with his folly, and pour out the full tide of my doubts and my complaints of Jessie, even before I had heard his story.

God is more merciful to us than we know in withholding

the opportunity of speech when we most desire to have it. Roger went into the parlour, and found William there alone. I heard him inquire for me, and he was coming up-stairs, but William detained him. They talked together for nearly a quarter of an hour, and in that time I had leisure to recover myself. Martha took in supper, and I was compelled to go down. William was suffering very much from his eyes, and was out of spirits. Roger exerted himself to amuse him, and we talked upon indifferent subjects; and after supper I read a little to him out of the newspaper which Roger had brought from Hove. Then came prayers, family prayers, — never more blessed than on that night. When I heard Roger's solemn and most earnest voice, speaking from the depths of his heart, the bitterness and exaggeration of my feelings died away in self-reproach, and I felt that I, not he, had in God's sight been weak and worthy of condemnation. That was a good preparation for what was to follow; but the trial was still great. Roger came up to my room — happy, so intensely happy, he neither saw nor imagined any want of sympathy on my part. Jessie had accepted him, with more love, more humility, trust, and simple religious feeling than even in his most sanguine moments he had anticipated. He could with difficulty bring himself to tell me how he managed to see her. The little details of his message, and the excuse he had made of having a parcel to give her, and the circumstance of Mrs. Temple's having gone out to dinner, — all important to me, — were scarcely remembered. He could only say, again and again, "Ursie, God is too good to me; it frightens me. She is an angel." And I could only reply, "Dearest, may God grant you to be happy with her!"

CHAPTER L.

I ROSE the next morning at my usual hour, after a disturbed night. There was but little shock in the waking, for thoughts of Roger had been with me all night. I dressed

myself mechanically, thinking of him still. I went about my work with one idea present to me. Every thing I saw, heard, or did, had reference to it. A change had come over life, such as that which I have heard described as experienced by the man who fell into a trance, and was aroused from it after a lapse of fifty years. I found myself grown old and independent, and I marvelled to see that others could quietly pursue their ordinary occupations. If I could have had my will, I would have bade the world, at least my own little world, stop in its course, wind up its affairs, bid farewell to the past, and begin for the future a new life, with new hopes, and, in some degree, new principles.

But life seldom knows such sudden breaks. We must all pass through the period of transition, more trying to the temper, if not the feelings, than the fulness of sorrow or of joy. Roger called me to him after breakfast, and asked what I was going to do with myself all day.

"A good many things." I answered; "it is washing day, and I shall be very busy."

"You wouldn't have time, I suppose, for a walk. Jessie wants very much to see you."

"Perhaps she had better come over here," I answered. "I can't see her with any comfort at Stonecliff."

"She said she was afraid it was impossible. Mrs. Weir is more ill than usual."

"Is she? You never told me that," I said, quickly.

"I thought you knew it," was Roger's reply.

"No," I said. "I seldom go near Stonecliff now. Is Jessie anxious about her?"

"She did not seem so; only she thought it wouldn't quite do to ask for a holiday. But that won't last long now, Ursie."

I thought for a few seconds, feeling strangely aggravated. Then I said: "I will try and go over in the course of the afternoon; but I must go alone."

He looked sorely disappointed. "Yes," I said, "you must let me see Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Temple, and tell them the state of things; and then if you want to see Jessie there

will be no difficulty. But it won't do, Roger, to have people making remarks, as they are sure to do if you don't give your reasons for seeking Jessie's company."

"Well," he said, "I suppose you are right. Nothing stops people's mouths like being open about your affairs. And neither Jessie nor I have any thing to hide in the matter."

"And I suppose you will tell William this morning," I said.

"I have told him; I spoke to him before I said any thing to you. Only I begged him not to mention the matter, because I wanted to have it out with you myself."

I am afraid something in my countenance betrayed the annoyance which I felt in my heart. William to be told before me! I could not have imagined it.

"You are vexed with me, my little Trot," said Roger kindly; "but I mustn't have you misunderstand. William is such a chief person in all our plans, that if he had greatly objected the whole thing might have fallen to the ground. I was bound, therefore, to find out his mind upon the matter first."

A very matter of fact answer; but it did not soothe my ruffled feelings. I walked away, but he followed me. "Ursie, darling, the first day of the new happiness is not to be the last of the old, is it?"

I answered him by a burst of tears. He sat down by me in the window-seat, and drew me fondly towards him; but the touch of his hand was to me like the touch of cold lead, and I withdrew myself from him, saying: "I am very wicked, Roger, I know. You ought to hate me, and you will, for I hate myself."

"You are jealous, Ursie," he replied, gravely. "I suppose I ought to have been prepared for it. But I thought you loved Jessie so well, that you looked on her as a sister already."

"Look on her!" I exclaimed. "Yes, Roger; but what is that? You would know if you were a woman; but you can't — you are a man."

"Then, perhaps I had better not try to know," he said, in the same grave tone; and he stood up to leave me. I could not bear that. I took hold of his hand and looked piteously in his face. My heart was so full, I felt as though it would burst. "Oh, Roger! love me," I said. And he stooped down and pressed his lips to my forehead, and I threw my arm round him and kissed him as in former days, with the yearning tenderness of my exceeding love; and then the cold blank fell upon my heart again, and I knew that I had said farewell to that first joy of my youth for ever.

I had strong, passionate, exaggerated affections, but I had also a certain share of right principle and common sense. And what was often almost equally important to me, I was keenly sensible of the slightest absence of sympathy, or want of perception of the nature of my feelings in those with whom I lived. I might give way to an outburst of grief or joy under the pressure of excitement; but the slightest change of voice, or shade of indifference in manner, restored me to my self-possession; and I could then quietly take out my feelings, as it were, and looking at them by the light in which they were seen by the world, keep them under stern control, and compel myself for the future to show only so much as my friends could comprehend and appreciate.

After that interview with Roger, I felt lowered in my own eyes. He could not understand, neither would others. To be so distressed at the idea of a brother's marriage with a person whom I had known, and in a certain way loved, all my life, must to the world be a simple absurdity. More especially when Roger was about to remain in England instead of making for himself a home in Canada. Many, probably, will scarcely believe that I would rather have been parted from him for years, with the full conviction that I was first in his affections, and that I could still look up to him without distrust of his judgment, than have lived with him for the remainder of my life, under present circumstances, in the most perfect English home that could be offered me. But so it was. I said it to myself in so many words, and then I added: "That

is my view of the case; now I will see what is required of me by the opinion of the world."

I must prepare myself first for congratulations; and self-respect and feeling for Roger and Jessie demanded that I should receive them cheerfully, in the spirit in which they were offered. Let the bitterness be what it might, no one must know it. Another trial, and perhaps a worse one, would be the necessity of a throughly cordial, affectionate meeting with Jessie. That must be gone through immediately, the sooner the better. When I understood her view of her future position, I should be better able to determine what way to regard my own; and there must be no further exhibition of feeling with Roger. Either it would deaden his affection, or make his home wretched. I had been weak, but he should be taught to look upon the feeling as a temporary jealousy; he should never be reminded how deep was the wound he had unconsciously made. I looked at all these necessities calmly, and with somewhat of a feeling of strength. To be without aim or purpose in trouble, that it was which tried me. When I had once made up my mind what I was to do, and what I should be called upon to struggle against, I could be comparatively satisfied; and I prayed now that God would help me to keep my resolution, for I knew that my stumbling-block was self-confidence.

About eleven o'clock William was accustomed to come in from the field, and take a glass of ale and a bit of bread. He liked rather to linger about then and talk, for he was beginning, poor fellow! to feel the days long. I knew that would be the time when I must hear what he might have to say about Roger and Jessie, — how naturally the two names seemed already to run together! — and I took my needlework into the parlour about ten minutes before the time, and sat down waiting for him. He came in, drank off his glass of beer, and began upon the subject at once. "Well, Ursie, what do you say to the new plans? odd enough, aren't they?"

"Not odd that Roger should stay in England," I said. "'t is the best thing that can be done, and as to Jessie —"

"She is not the kind of girl I should have thought would have taken his fancy," continued William. "But one never knows. Yet somehow, Ursie, I think if it was not for you he might find he had made a blunder."

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William hurried away much sooner than usual; and that was all the help or consolation I was to receive from him. I began to feel very lonely, not the less so because I was setting out for Stonecliff.

In the afternoon, Roger came to me and gave me a note to take to Jessie. How to manage my visit I could not tell. First I thought I would go direct to Mrs. Temple; then I decided that it would be a breach of confidence with Jessie; and again I was perplexed as to what I should say to soften the trouble to Mrs. Weir. The very thinking about these things did me a great deal of good, and by the time I arrived at Stonecliff I was as little excited, and as much fidgeted, as a person need be who wishes to act wisely under trying circumstances. There is nothing as good for preserving the balance of common sense as a dose of matter of fact worries.

"I want to see Miss Lee," was my address to the saucy little page who opened the door, and I spoke in a determined

been striving to retain, burst forth against my will; "injustice is such a cold, cold word."

"But I must use it," he said. "It has been in my mind always, that if I did marry, it should not be selfishly. You were my first claim, Ursie, and if I could not have formed a new home without turning you out of the old one, I would have lived and died unmarried."

"That would have been little kindness to me," I said, — "to make me feel that I stood in the way of your happiness."

"But you should not have felt it," he replied. "I could have crushed my love, and I would have done so, through God's help, and you should never have known it."

"You think little of a woman's penetration," I said.

"But I have done it," he replied. "If I had been obliged to return to Canada, neither you nor Jessie would ever have known what was in my heart."

"Not Jessie!" I exclaimed.

"No, not Jessie; the climate would have killed her. I knew it, for I asked the question of the doctor at Compton. And, Ursie, it would have cost her no pang. She would have married another, without any thought of me. She may do so now."

The tone in which he spoke was inexpressibly sad and anxious. I could but answer, though my voice seemed to fail me, "Roger, she must love you, you will be happy."

A brilliant smile passed over his face. "My precious little Trot, always my comforter. But I want to speak more of you now, to tell you how things have come about. William and I talked over business matters this morning. He knows his own state now, he is not fit to manage the farm, and he wishes me to take it from him. That might be better than Canada, Ursie. He will have his home with us still; we shall be together, as we were for those few happy weeks, when Jessie was staying with us. And William sees things rightly as regards you, Ursie. He knows that he must make a provision for you, and he is willing to do so, now that he has no other claim. You will be no loser."

her yourself; you are your own master, and she is her own mistress."

I felt quite sure that I had pained him, and my heart reproached me for my tone.

"You can't understand, Ursie," he said, after a pause; and a dagger's thrust could not have given me the anguish of those few words.

"I can; yes, — I can, indeed," I exclaimed, — and I spoke truth; for a dawn of light had broken upon me. "It is you, Roger, — but don't let us talk about that; — you know how I love you, — only be happy."

He repeated the word happy in a doubtful tone adding, "One can't be happy in suspense —"

We were then on the top of the down. Roger stopped irresolute. I saw what was in his thoughts. He looked towards Compton. "Are you going that way?" I said. I turned in the other direction, but he delayed me. "Ursie, I can't bear this; you must stay and listen to me. God knows how I have fought with myself, and He knows also how I have thought of you."

We sat down upon the heather, and I prayed that I might bear what was coming. He continued: "I told you that I had loved Jessie from a child; but I never deceived you. I did not know it, — and you have been dearest always; — you are dearest, now, in your own way. The two affections cannot interfere. You will not lose a brother, you will only gain a sister."

"Please, Roger dear," I said, "if you will only not think of me. It is all right, — quite right; but I was not prepared. I wish only to see you happy."

"That does not satisfy me," he replied. "I don't care for my own happiness. If I could feel that I was injuring you, Trot, I would give up my hope at this moment, though with it I should give up all that makes life dear; and it has not been till to-day that I have felt I could think of myself without injustice to you."

"Oh! Roger," I said, and the tears which I had so long

been striving to retain, burst forth against my will; "injustice is such a cold, cold word."

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I tried to stop him, but he continued: "I must say it, because it has been a chief thought with me. To leave you to the chance of struggling on in the world, as best you might, after all we have been to each other, would bring a curse upon me. I couldn't do it, even though it were to save Jessie from a life like it. I knew that I must see you out of the mire before I thought of myself, and now God has opened the way to carry out my wish. Oh! Ursie, can't you say to me that you think His blessing will be on it?"

I pressed his hand, — no words would come.

"She is not what you expected for me, I know," he said, answering what he felt to be in my mind. "But, Ursie, I could not love a grave, staid woman of my own age."

"No," I replied, "I am aware of that. I feel what you want, Roger; but, — let me say it now, for I may never do so again, — are you sure that you know Jessie?"

"I have seen her," he exclaimed, "in times of trial: I have watched her through Mrs. Morris's illness, and when she was with us; and now, troubled as she is by her life at Stonecliff. Whatever she may have been as a child, Ursie, sorrow has, through God's grace, made her a noble woman."

I could not tell him the depth of my fear that the change as yet was not to be relied upon for a continuance. I had even then learnt that it is no part of true wisdom to endeavour to give our own impression, to the disparagement of any individual, when the person with whom we are conversing, and from whom we differ, has the same facts as ourselves from which to judge. The unfavourable opinion has no effect except to excite a suspicion of prejudice, and the words hastily spoken leave behind them wounds which perhaps will never be healed. What I said of Jessie at that moment might influence the whole of our future lives.

Roger waited for me to reply; but, instead of doing so, I kissed him once more tenderly, and whispered: "God guide you to what is best; I can't, Roger," and turned away.

And I was blind, senselessly blind! I had not seen, what was self-evident to the eyes of others; I was surprised at the

existence of feelings which I had myself been instrumental in no slight measure in bringing about!

I confess all;—I can only say for myself, in excuse, that others have done likewise. As in illness, so most frequently in love, the persons most deeply interested are the last to perceive the existence of danger.

But had I really any right to consider it danger? When I rushed up to my own room, and poured out to Him who alone could comfort me, the bitter anguish of "the wounded spirit—which who can bear?" was I justified in my wretchedness? Let those fear to judge who have never been similarly tried.

Yet without doubt I was selfish and unreasonable in my love for Roger. I had found in him all I needed to satisfy my imagination, and my reverence; and my affection had indeed so engrossed me that I scarcely thought about other men except to feel that they were his inferiors. I may not be believed when I say this, but it is true. But in this overpowering feeling I forgot that I did not stand in the same relation to him. I filled the place which in God's Providence was intended to be second, and I thought it the first; because the first was vacant. The world saw it. Again and again I had been told that Roger would marry, but I clung to the image of my own love, reflected in his, and in my heart felt myself wiser than the world. This was the root of bitterness. If Jessie had been an angel of goodness I must still have been wretched for the time, for the foundation on which I had unconsciously built up my fabric of earthly happiness was undermined. But the circumstances of my trial were aggravated, as it appeared to me, a hundredfold by Roger's choice: Jessie was unworthy of him. She might be gentle, sweet tempered, winning in manner, anxious to act rightly, but she was essentially inferior to him, and Roger was blind in not perceiving it. I acknowledged his consideration, his generous thought for myself, his singular unselfishness. I longed to be grateful. I hoped I was so; but his weakness I could not forgive.

As we go on in life, we open our eyes to the facts of human

inconsistency, and, knowing that all are fallible, we cease to expect infallibility. But it is not so when we are young, and the first dawning upon the mind, of a failing in one whom we respect, is one of the most painful trials which at that age we can be called upon to bear. When I thought of Roger as deceived, deluded, caught by a sweet smile, and the expression of a passing wish to do right, which might never be carried into action, I felt as though I had no longer any judgment upon which to rest. He had erred in this case, the most important upon which a man can be called upon to decide, and he might err in others likewise. Even if Jessie were to refuse him, it would not comfort me. He had loved her — that was enough. The dreariness and disappointment which took possession of me I can never describe. As I sat down on a low seat by my bed-side, I felt deadened. Prayer, all powerful though it was, could not restore my dream of human perfection. I do not know how long I remained alone. It grew quite dark. I heard Martha moving about below, and William's voice called out for candles, and I ought to go down-stairs to him; but I made an excuse to myself because of my grief. I let him stay by himself, and fancied that I was excused from attending upon him. The moon rose slowly over the hill, and its cold light streamed in upon my room. I knew that Roger must soon return. I was sure he had been to Compton, and had seen Jessie; and I went to the window, which looked out upon the lane, and watched for his coming. I thought I could tell even by the way he walked whether his mission had been prosperous. I had not long to wait. A dark figure stood upon the brow of the hill, full in the moonlight. Never before had I seen Roger draw near without a thrill of untold love and delight; now, nervous and heartsick, I watched his footsteps, counting them as it were by the beatings of my heart, and scarcely able to restrain myself from rushing out to upbraid him with his folly, and pour out the full tide of my doubts and my complaints of Jessie, even before I had heard his story.

God is more merciful to us than we know in withholding

the opportunity of speech when we most desire to have it. Roger went into the parlour, and found William there alone. I heard him inquire for me, and he was coming up-stairs, but William detained him. They talked together for nearly a quarter of an hour, and in that time I had leisure to recover myself. Martha took in supper, and I was compelled to go down. William was suffering very much from his eyes, and was out of spirits. Roger exerted himself to amuse him, and we talked upon indifferent subjects; and after supper I read a little to him out of the newspaper which Roger had brought from Hove. Then came prayers, family prayers, — never more blessed than on that night. When I heard Roger's solemn and most earnest voice, speaking from the depths of his heart, the bitterness and exaggeration of my feelings died away in self-reproach, and I felt that I, not he, had in God's sight been weak and worthy of condemnation. That was a good preparation for what was to follow; but the trial was still great. Roger came up to my room — happy, so intensely happy, he neither saw nor imagined any want of sympathy on my part. Jessie had accepted him, with more love, more humility, trust, and simple religious feeling than even in his most sanguine moments he had anticipated. He could with difficulty bring himself to tell me how he managed to see her. The little details of his message, and the excuse he had made of having a parcel to give her, and the circumstance of Mrs. Temple's having gone out to dinner, — all important to me, — were scarcely remembered. He could only say, again and again, "Ursie, God is too good to me; it frightens me. She is an angel." And I could only reply, "Dearest, may God grant you to be happy with her!"

CHAPTER L.

I ROSE the next morning at my usual hour, after a disturbed night. There was but little shock in the waking, for *thoughts of Roger* had been with me all night. I dressed

myself mechanically, thinking of him still. I went about my work with one idea present to me. Every thing I saw, heard, or did, had reference to it. A change had come over life, such as that which I have heard described as experienced by the man who fell into a trance, and was aroused from it after a lapse of fifty years. I found myself grown old and independent, and I marvelled to see that others could quietly pursue their ordinary occupations. If I could have had my will, I would have bade the world, at least my own little world, stop in its course, wind up its affairs, bid farewell to the past, and begin for the future a new life, with new hopes, and, in some degree, new principles.

But life seldom knows such sudden breaks. We must all pass through the period of transition, more trying to the temper, if not the feelings, than the fulness of sorrow or of joy. Roger called me to him after breakfast, and asked what I was going to do with myself all day.

"A good many things." I answered; "it is washing day, and I shall be very busy."

"You wouldn't have time, I suppose, for a walk. Jessie wants very much to see you."

"Perhaps she had better come over here," I answered. "I can't see her with any comfort at Stonecliff."

"She said she was afraid it was impossible. Mrs. Weir is more ill than usual."

"Is she? You never told me that," I said, quickly.

"I thought you knew it," was Roger's reply.

"No," I said. "I seldom go near Stonecliff now. Is Jessie anxious about her?"

"She did not seem so; only she thought it wouldn't quite do to ask for a holiday. But that won't last long now, Ursie."

I thought for a few seconds, feeling strangely aggravated. Then I said: "I will try and go over in the course of the afternoon; but I must go alone."

He looked sorely disappointed. "Yes," I said, "you must let me see Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Temple, and tell them the state of things; and then if you want to see Jessie there

will be no difficulty. But it won't do, Roger, to have people making remarks, as they are sure to do if you don't give your reasons for seeking Jessie's company."

"Well," he said, "I suppose you are right. Nothing stops people's mouths like being open about your affairs. And neither Jessie nor I have any thing to hide in the matter."

"And I suppose you will tell William this morning," I said.

"I have told him; I spoke to him before I said any thing to you. Only I begged him not to mention the matter, because I wanted to have it out with you myself."

I am afraid something in my countenance betrayed the annoyance which I felt in my heart. William to be told before me! I could not have imagined it.

"You are vexed with me, my little Trot," said Roger kindly; "but I mustn't have you misunderstand. William is such a chief person in all our plans, that if he had greatly objected the whole thing might have fallen to the ground. I was bound, therefore, to find out his mind upon the matter first."

A very matter of fact answer; but it did not soothe my ruffled feelings. I walked away, but he followed me. "Ursie, darling, the first day of the new happiness is not to be the last of the old, is it?"

I answered him by a burst of tears. He sat down by me in the window-seat, and drew me fondly towards him; but the touch of his hand was to me like the touch of cold lead, and I withdrew myself from him, saying: "I am very wicked, Roger, I know. You ought to hate me, and you will, for I hate myself."

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"Look on her!" I exclaimed. "Yes, Roger; but what is that? You would know if you were a woman; but you can't — *you are a man.*"

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"I want to see Miss Lee," was my address to the saucy little page who opened the door, and I spoke in a determined

tone, to assure him there could be no doubt as to my gaining my point.

"He did not know" — pages never do know — "whether such an interview was possible." But I urged him to decision by insisting that, if I could not see Miss Lee, I must see Mrs. Weir, or Mrs. Temple, or some one; and I made my way into the hall, and seeing the door of the little breakfast-room open, and knowing that it was very seldom used, I said, "I will just wait here, and you can let Miss Lee know that I want to see her."

He stared at me, but finding that I was not open to any impressions of awe, he left me.

I confess I felt uncommonly nervous. I sat down and tapped my foot upon the floor, then I stood up and looked at the pictures on the wall, then I walked to the window and watched a boy weeding one of the flower-beds, and at last I went to the door and listened. Distant sounds in the kitchen, those were all I could hear, and I thought the page had proved faithless, and was upon the point of seeking him out and expostulating, but a light footstep came along the passage at the top of the stairs, and the next minute Jessie had thrown herself into my arms, her face covered with blushes, as she exclaimed — "Oh! Ursie, isn't it too happy?"

How thankful I was for her excitement, I really could not attempt to say. It saved me completely. I don't believe she in the least suspected any coldness on my side. She was so full of her own delight, that it never entered her thoughts that every one else was not to be delighted too. And then Roger was to stay in England, and she was to live at Sandcombe, dear Sandcombe; she had never loved any place so well, and I was to be with her, and to be her sister. She was in a perfect ecstasy of happiness. I didn't know whether it was hard in me to think that this childish exuberance was not quite the tone I should have desired for Roger's wife, but of course I did not attempt to check her. All that I really had set my heart upon discovering was the full extent of her feeling for him. *Even this it was* not easy to obtain: she was surprised, grate-

I tried to stop him, but he continued: "I must say it, because it has been a chief thought with me. To leave you to the chance of struggling on in the world, as best you might, after all we have been to each other, would bring a curse upon me. I couldn't do it, even though it were to save Jessie from a life like it. I knew that I must see you out of the mire before I thought of myself, and now God has opened the way to carry out my wish. Oh! Ursie, can't you say to me that you think His blessing will be on it?"

I pressed his hand, — no words would come.

"She is not what you expected for me, I know," he said, answering what he felt to be in my mind. "But, Ursie, I could not love a grave, staid woman of my own age."

"No," I replied, "I am aware of that. I feel what you want, Roger; but, — let me say it now, for I may never do so again, — are you sure that you know Jessie?"

"I have seen her," he exclaimed, "in times of trial: I have watched her through Mrs. Morris's illness, and when she was with us; and now, troubled as she is by her life at Stonecliff. Whatever she may have been as a child, Ursie, sorrow has, through God's grace, made her a noble woman."

I could not tell him the depth of my fear that the change as yet was not to be relied upon for a continuance. I had even then learnt that it is no part of true wisdom to endeavour to give our own impression, to the disparagement of any individual, when the person with whom we are conversing, and from whom we differ, has the same facts as ourselves from which to judge. The unfavourable opinion has no effect except to excite a suspicion of prejudice, and the words hastily spoken leave behind them wounds which perhaps will never be healed. What I said of Jessie at that moment might influence the whole of our future lives.

Roger waited for me to reply; but, instead of doing so, I kissed him once more tenderly, and whispered: "God guide you to what is best; I can't, Roger," and turned away.

And I was blind, senselessly blind! I had not seen, what was self-evident to the eyes of others; I was surprised at the

Roger was so impatient for all to be settled, but she did not like to mention it herself.

Something — it was very trifling — in her manner, gave me the impression that she was turning away from a disagreeable subject. I had a strong inclination to pursue it whether she liked it or not. If I had loved her heartily, I should have done so, but I stood upon doubtful ground. So I only replied by a remark upon Mrs. Weir's health.

Jessie's face was bright again directly. Mrs. Weir, she said, was much worse than usual, and there had been a fuss with Mrs. Temple. She did not, of course, know what it was all about, but she had an idea that it had something to do with money and a letter from Miss Milicent. She had heard Mrs. Temple say there would be no money forthcoming, and the only thing to be done was to leave Mr. Weir to go to ruin again his own way. And then Mrs. Weir had been very nervous, and cried a good deal, and Mrs. Temple had scolded her.

It was not a very hopeful condition of affairs, considering the communication I had to make. I should only be adding to the family disturbance. Yet I felt that in justice to Roger I must not delay.

"I must see Mrs. Temple, Jessie, dear," I said, "and tell her every thing: I promised Roger I would."

She blushed painfully. "Must you? I had not thought of that. She will be angry, and — but it is very kind of you, Ursie; you always help me out of difficulties."

"And I must see her at once," I said, "if she is in the house."

Jessie was not quite in such a hurry; she looked, but did not move towards the door. "Will you go?" I added.

"Yes; but, Ursie, Mrs. Temple is not very good-natured, you know that."

"Better than you do, perhaps; though I don't see what her good or ill-nature can have to do with the present business."

"I don't think she has liked me quite so well lately; you know what I told you about the letters."

"I know every thing, dear Jessie; I know Mrs. Temple fifty times better than you do, only go now, and ask if I may speak with her."

"And if she should say unkind things, you won't believe them," continued Jessie.

"I will believe nothing of which there is not proof," I said; "but one would think you were afraid of being accused of murder. If there is any thing to tell, why not say it to me now?"

"Oh! there is nothing; nothing, you misunderstand. It is all foolishness;" she exclaimed. "But Mrs. Temple was angry at my going over to Dene one afternoon, when Mrs. Weir let me take a walk, and she has been cross ever since, and then—" I think Jessie meant to say more, but at that instant Mrs. Temple entered the room, and Jessie hurried away without saying even good-bye.

CHAPTER LI.

I HAD not spoken to Mrs. Temple since the day when I had my interview with Cotton, and I was sure that she must have felt herself injured from the fact of my having seen Mrs. Weir then without her permission, to say nothing of my having been the recipient of Cotton's complaints. But possessing a clear conscience upon these points, I was able to look her boldly in the face, and I curtsied, and said that I hoped I had not come at an inconvenient time, but I had a little business with Jessie.

"It would be better, another time, if you were to send word beforehand when you wish for an interview," said Mrs. Temple, standing, and making me stand also. "Miss Lee is much engaged, and Mrs. Weir is not as well as usual."

"I am sorry, Ma'am," I replied, "but I had also something to say to yourself, if you could be so good as to spare me a few minutes."

She took out her watch.

"I have an engagement almost immediately, perhaps you will let your communication be brief."

"It is soon made, Ma'am," I replied. "Jessie Lee is engaged to be married to my brother Roger, and as she will be wishing to leave Mrs. Weir almost immediately, I thought it better to let you know."

A cloud came over Mrs. Temple's face as though I had actually done her an injury. "Very singular!" she exclaimed; "Miss Lee gave me no idea of any plan of the kind. I have not been treated fairly."

"The engagement was only made yesterday, Ma'am," I replied; "we have taken the earliest opportunity of informing you."

"There was an agreement," continued Mrs. Temple, "and Miss Lee suits Mrs. Weir very fairly well. I consider that I had a right to expect more consideration."

"Jessie will, I have no doubt, be anxious to remain with Mrs. Weir, if possible, until some one is found to take her place," I replied; "but of course I can make no promise, as every thing must depend on my brother's plans."

"Your brother is a rash young man," said Mrs. Temple, looking at me searchingly. "I should recommend him to inquire before he commits himself to the step he contemplates. You may tell him so."

"My brother will, no doubt, be obliged to you for your advice, Ma'am," I replied; "but as he is past thirty, I imagine he considers himself able to judge in such a matter for himself. I should not, therefore, like to interfere."

"Age may not imply wisdom," said Mrs. Temple. "Has your brother known this young woman long?"

"From her childhood, Ma'am," I replied, and turning from the unpleasant subject, I added: "May I ask how long you think it will be before Jessie will be able to leave Mrs. Weir, without inconveniencing her?"

"I can't say. Your brother has known this young woman long? Does he know her friends and acquaintances?"

"Nearly all of them, I believe, Ma'am," I replied.

"Nearly all, you believe. It would be better if it were quite all. I give the caution with no unfriendly feeling. Good morning. I must request you not to attempt to see Mrs. Weir, she is too ill."

I was not to be treated in that way, — and I followed Mrs. Temple into the hall. "Excuse me, Ma'am," I said, "but I can't hear hints given against Jessie. My brother's happiness is involved. If you would only be good enough to explain what you refer to."

"I give no explanations. I am not the person to bring forward accusations. Your brother will judge for himself when he inquires."

I had no power of detaining her, she sailed past me, — her pony-chaise was at the door, and she drove off, leaving me to my own conjectures. I went back to the little room, and sat for a few moments in thought. Then I rang the bell, and asked again if I might see Miss Lee. The message brought back was that I was to go up to Mrs. Weir's room.

I was in utter perplexity. Disobey Mrs. Temple's express wishes I could not, for she had a right to expect obedience — but if Mrs. Weir really wanted to see me, I might do her harm by refusing. I sent word to Jessie that she must do as I said — she must come to me, and almost before I thought the message could have reached her, she was with me. But it was only to entreat that I would not lose a moment, that I would go instantly to Mrs. Weir, for she was very ill — very strange — it was impossible to know what to make of her, and Jessie was so pale and trembling that I could not doubt her having real cause for alarm.

"She takes it to heart dreadfully," whispered Jessie to me, as we stood at the door of Mrs. Weir's sitting-room.

"To heart! you have not told her, Jessie, suddenly?"

"You said she was to know, and I thought you were in the house, and it was better over. But, Ursie, I never saw her in such a way. Do go in. She will listen to you."

I don't wonder that Jessie was frightened. Mrs. Weir was in a perfect agony of nervous distress, rocking herself back-

wards and forwards in her chair, crying like a child, — and murmuring from time to time, "All alone! all alone! — yes, they all go — they won't let me go too — all alone!"

Jessie went behind her chair. I motioned to her to keep out of the way, and went up to Mrs. Weir. "Dear Ma'am," I said, "you are not all alone, for there is some one here who cares for you very much. You always used to say that you were sure Ursula would never leave you, and you see she does not."

She grasped my hand like a vice, I did not know she had so much strength in her.

"You have left me," she said, "there is no one but Jessie now, and she is going too. If God would but take me — no one goes away in Heaven."

"That will come in His good time, dear Ma'am," I said; "but you have often told me that He stays with us, whoever of our earthly friends may chance to leave us."

"I am very wicked. God pardon me, Ursula, — I used to love you, — now I love Jessie. I will try not to love any one again."

"Would not that be wrong, dear Ma'am?" I said. "God means us to love one another surely. And no one has left off loving you. You can't think I have."

"Yet, Ursula, you do not come to me, and you have kept things back from me, and you would not let me have what I wanted from the Farm, and then Cotton talked to you, and that did her harm, and she went away, and now you are wishing Jessie to go too. I would not have treated you so, Ursula, for I loved you very much."

My heart sank, and in the extremity of my vexation I burst into tears. The poor lady softened towards me in an instant. The sight of my distress roused her from her own.

"Do not cry, Ursula," she said; "it makes me sad — and I do not want that; and I am going to bear it all now, for it was wrong in me to care. Jessie Lee will marry and be very happy, and I like people to be happy. Perhaps God will some day let me be happy, in Heaven."

I took hold of her hand, and kissed it many times. She gazed at me, — strangely and earnestly; then she said: "They told me you would not help me."

"Whoever told you that, told you what is false, Ma'am," I exclaimed. "There does not live on the face of the earth a single human being who would help you, even to death, more truly than I, if I only knew the way."

"Would you?" she replied, and she looked round the room timidly.

"Leave us for a minute, Jessie," I said; and when the door was closed, I added: "There is no one here now to listen, Ma'am, so you can say out whatever is in your mind." Mrs. Weir hesitated, her features worked nervously, and I could feel the quick, thin, interrupted beating of her pulse, as she laid her hand on mine. "Ursula," she said, in a low voice, "my husband does not want me; but I must go to him, or I shall die. It lies here heavy on my heart, — but they will not think it. When they say I must not go, God lets me be tempted. I feel bitter things. I am not resigned to His will, and I strive — I strive; but the struggle is very weary. And I have had a thought sometimes lately, that I would go away, all by myself. It comes to me in the night, and I think I will get up and go, but it is an evil spirit that puts it into my head. It is an evil spirit, is it not? You know, because your mind is clear, and mine is tired; oh! Ursula, it is very tired; but it never rests from thinking."

I was frightened, yet I did not suppose her brain was wandering, only strained; her words were calm and her look was quiet, though intensely mournful. My reply was from instinct, — I had no time for reflection.

"Dear Ma'am," I said, "I don't think it is an evil spirit that puts the wish into your heart, for it seems to me quite natural; and now you have said it out to me, perhaps you will be better."

"I ought not to have said it," she said, turning her head quickly. "My niece tells me that I am to crush the wish, and kill it, but it will not die. I have never told her of that

wicked thought, that I would go away by myself. I have told you, Ursula, because I cannot help it. I have never told any one else; when you are with me I always think you love me."

I answered as quickly and decidedly as I could, "You don't merely think I love you, Ma'am, but you know it; and there is nothing in the world to hinder you from speaking of any thing you wish to me. God sees no harm in the wish to go away and join Mr. Weir, — that I am quite certain of. The only trouble is how it is to be managed. But the way will no doubt be put before you too if it is right, and till it is I know you will pray to God to give you patience."

A smile more touching to me than tears stole over Mrs. Weir's face. "I could wait very long with hope," she said; "but, Ursula, are you sure?" and again the look of doubt was upon her, — "my niece says I ought to crush the wish."

"Say it out, dear Ma'am," I replied. "I will die away all the quicker for that, if it is fit that it should. You know," I added, and I laughed a little, "the steam does more mischief when it is kept in than when it is allowed to escape."

"I think so, Ursula. I feel better, and I will try and not think till you come to see me again. But then you never come now."

"I mean to come as often as I can, Ma'am," I said; "you may always depend upon my doing my utmost to comfort you, and I shall have to ask you to help me about some work, for I want to make something pretty for Jessie when she is married."

I was almost afraid what the effect of the allusion might be; but it was taken quietly, though mournfully, and Mrs. Weir said, — "Yes, she will leave me soon. She has been very kind to me, Ursula. I should like to give her something that would please her, but my money is gone, — all I have to give. I must keep the rest, you know, it is wanted."

"You might knit her something, dear Ma'am," I said; "she would value that more than any thing else." Mrs. Weir's face brightened like a child's with pleasure. "That is a good

thought," she said. "I have some patterns for shawls; would you look in the drawer of my work-table? Ursula, I think you will find them there."

The patterns were found and discussed; and one was chosen. The shawl was to be white, with a pink border. Mrs. Weir threw herself into the idea with an animation which I fancied she had entirely lost, and before I left her I doubt whether the pain of parting with Jessie was not almost counterbalanced by the pleasure of working for her.

Jessie and I had but a few words together before I left the house, — and they were of no importance. I did not at the moment remember that I had intended to have spoken to her on the subject of Mrs. Temple's hints, for other cares were pressing on me. I had bound myself to Mrs. Weir, by giving her sympathy and encouragement, in a way I did not perceive till I found myself walking alone over the hill, and able to think quietly upon what had passed. I was sure my words would not be forgotten, and I scarcely wished they should be. That interview had given me a more painful impression of the state of Mrs. Weir's mind, and the necessity of some interference, than I had ever had before. Of course I did not believe that Mrs. Temple was willingly worrying Mrs. Weir out of her senses. No doubt she had a good deal of reason on her side. But she was acting selfishly, and on a system; and persons who work upon others on system seem to forget that God has willed there should be infinite variety in this world, both in Nature and in human beings, — and that to suppose that what suits one will therefore suit another, is simply making ourselves out to be wiser than God. Mrs. Temple, I knew, was strongly imbued with the belief that all persons' nervousness, except her own, could be cured by severity. I had often heard her say so; and Mrs. Weir, in her simple timidity, acquiesced in the notion, and took the discipline bestowed upon her as medicine, — very disagreeable, but quite right for her to submit to; only unfortunately it did her no good. Yet when I say that I had a painful impression of the state of Mrs. Weir's mind, I do not mean to imply that I

thought she was going out of it. I had no idea of the kind. Mrs. Weir saw all things truly — there was no distortion of facts, and no absence of the power of reasoning upon them. Even in her weakest, most irritable, and excitable moments, there never had been any thing of that nature. It was merely that she was possessed (if I may so express myself) by one idea founded upon reason; and from bodily weakness, and an absence of self-discipline, allowed it to assume an exaggerated importance. Keeping this to herself in no way lessened the evil; rather it increased it, for the thoughts upon which we brood in secret are tenfold more oppressive than those which we openly discuss. The crushing and killing which Mrs. Temple recommended would, I was sure, be of no avail. A thought which has a rational foundation cannot be killed; all we can do with it is to give it light and air, and see it in its true proportion. Mrs. Temple treated poor Mrs. Weir's conscientious scruple, about being absent from her husband, as she would one of those absurd, irrational fancies which are sometimes allowed to try persons otherwise perfectly reasonable, and which can only be destroyed by a vigorous effort of the will. Crush these for a time, and reason itself steps in afterwards to prove their folly. But to reason against reason is useless; and when conscience and reason act together, the difficulty becomes insurmountable.

I am putting down now the result of long observation. I had none of these thoughts on the day when I walked back from Stonecliff to Sandcombe, for, as I said before, I had been acting on instinct rather than reflection; but I could not help seeing that I had committed myself more than was perhaps prudent. I had held out to Mrs. Weir the hope that something would be done to enable her to rejoin her husband, and I had explicitly told her that I would see her frequently, and that she might depend upon me for comfort. Whether wise or unwise, I must keep my word, and that against any objection or interference on the part of Mrs. Temple. Very much troubled I was as I thought of this, and when my mind turned to my usual adviser, Roger, I was met by the dispiriting

conviction that I could not expect to gain his full sympathy, and scarcely his attention, and I resolved not to attempt it. It is unfair to try any individual beyond the ordinary limits of human power; and a man in love is always to be looked upon as free, for the time being, from the claims of extensive sympathy; not however from any principle of right or duty, but as a concession to that known infirmity of which we all partake. The knowledge of this fact was painful to me, but I felt safer and happier in not putting Roger to the test than in doing so with the risk of failure. I was already beginning to look upon him as subject to the same weaknesses as his fellow-creatures.

Mr. Richardson was my only resource, and I determined to go over to Compton the first day I could, and put all I knew and felt before him. Even if he could not help me, I should then have at least the satisfaction of feeling that I was not acting entirely on my own responsibility.

I reached home just in time for tea. Roger and John Hervey met me at the farm-yard gate. Roger's face was full of eager expectation. He wanted me to come with him at once, and tell him all that had passed. John Hervey said, as Roger walked away, "I hope they will be happy, Ursie. You don't want me to congratulate you."

My heart bounded with a sense of relief. I looked up at him and said, "Thank you, Mr. Hervey, that is like a friend."

He said not another word, and walked into the house, but I was brighter that evening than I had been since I heard of Roger's plans, for I felt that there was still some one in the world who understood me.

CHAPTER LII.

Mr. Richardson was away attending upon his father, who was dying. Such was the information given me when I went to Compton to see him. I must manage, then, as best I might

without his advice, and after some consideration I felt that it might be well to be bold, and make use of Jessie's affairs as an excuse for seeing Mrs. Weir frequently. If I did not appear to perceive Mrs. Temple's dislike, I hoped it might not actually be exerted against me; and if I could interest Mrs. Weir, and help to keep her quiet, I might even become necessary. At any rate I would try. I thought too of Jessie much and anxiously. Mrs. Temple's hints were by no means forgotten. I pondered upon them deeply, and again thought I would call upon her to explain them. But she had spoken proudly and angrily, and the more I considered what had passed, the less weight I was inclined to attach to her words. Jessie's life was no mystery. I seemed to know what she had done and said, I could almost add what she had thought, from childhood. Her intercourse with Mrs. Price and acquaintance with Mr. Macdonald were the only things which I could really disapprove, and I knew much better than Mrs. Temple how far these had been carried. To make inquiries would be implying suspicion, and might involve explanations which I did not feel myself at liberty to give.

Neither could I say any thing to Roger. I had always felt that before people are engaged one is free to offer general warnings, but that afterwards nothing but indisputable facts can justify interference. A man cannot break his promise because he hears what he ought to have been aware of before he made it. I had great trust, too, in Jessie herself. I saw no reason for thinking that any thing serious was amiss. She had always given me her confidence, and the little air of secrecy I had observed in our interview at Stonecliff was accounted for by Mrs. Temple's suspicious temper and prejudice. No doubt Mrs. Temple disliked Mr. Macdonald and Mrs. Price, and thought that Jessie was unwise in having them for her friends. So did I. But Jessie knew this already. It could do no good to make a fuss about the matter, just at the moment when the acquaintance was likely, as I hoped, to be entirely broken off. Altogether I thought it better to say nothing, except continually to urge upon her the necessity of treating Roger

with perfect openness. If she would do this, all would be well, and I could not but believe that as she knew him better, his gentleness and sympathy would win more and more upon her affections, and lead her to confide every thought and feeling to him.

So I went on, not blindly, not happily, but trying to make the best of a state of things which I felt could not be mended.

In six weeks only from the day of their engagement, Roger and Jessie were to be married. I suppose if the marriage had been the event which above all others I most desired, there would still have been some aggravations attending it. The mere upsetting of household arrangements, the discussions, the preparations, the little thoughtlessnesses and exclusivenesses, if one may use the word, of two persons who are all in all to each other, and feel that, for the time being, they are the pivot on which the world turns, must alone give rise to annoyances. But in my case there were other and much more serious causes for vexation. I say nothing of my own individual feeling with regard to Roger. I have already expressed it. If it is not understood, no words of mine will cause it to be so, and if it is, no further explanation will be needed. But as day after day went by, and I had fresh opportunities of studying Jessie's character, I became more disheartened and perplexed at the ignorance of Roger's choice and the difficulties which were in preparation both for him and me. If I could have seen why he fell in love with Jessie, I fancied I could have been happier. But it was a moral problem which I was wholly unable to solve. A problem also was my future position at Sandcombe.

In his great kindness, his wish to make every thing easy for every one, Roger was always saying that his marriage would make no change in the family. William was the master, I was the mistress, Jessie and he would live with us, and would do every thing in their power to help us; but they had not the slightest wish to interfere. And Jessie was lavish in her promises, and, I am sure, perfectly sincere in her inten-

tions. But at the very moment Roger was saying this, he was directing all that went on, both with regard to money matters and the management of the farm. William was becoming every day more unfit to look after his own affairs, and Roger was the responsible person not only in little daily matters, but even in actual business. He had thrown some of his money into the farm, laying it out in ways which were considered advantageous, upon the express understanding, and indeed the written agreement (for he was particular enough in such ways) that when the new lease was made out, which it would be, according to Mr. Stewart's promise, very shortly, it was to be in his name. He would then be the master of Sandcombe, and his wife of course would be the mistress, and what was I to be? I put the case before him, and to my exceeding surprise found that he actually would not see any difficulty in it; — though, if he had been an indifferent person, the awkwardness would have been as evident to him as the sun in the heavens! He said that I was wishing to draw lines where no lines could be drawn; that all would work well if left to itself; where people loved each other as we did, it must do so; that Jessie had the highest opinion of my judgment, and would be entirely guided by me; that he felt the same; and he added that he could not have thought of marrying with any idea of turning me out of the place which I had always held. As to names, they were nothing. What did it signify who was called mistress? Neither Jessie nor I had any foolish love of power, and for his own part he had not the slightest doubt of our working together delightfully. Much more he said of the same kind, and at the conclusion he left me with the conviction impressed more than ever on my mind, that names constitute one of the greatest moving powers of this fallen world; that every name implies relations and duties; and that to assume the name when we are unable to fulfil the duties belonging to it is to involve ourselves in inextricable confusion and wretchedness.

I did not say so to Roger, but I went to Mrs. Kemp. It was just a fortnight before the wedding was to take place.

The next day Jessie was to leave Mrs. Weir, and come to us. I felt I must have my mind made clear upon this subject beforehand. Not that Jessie was likely to think about it, but I was quite sure she would feel; and persons who feel and don't think, are the most difficult of all to manage. I had also a little business to settle with Mrs. Kemp, as to the young person who was to fill Jessie's place. Mrs. Kemp, in her kindness, had exerted herself to find one, in order that Jessie might the sooner be set free, and Jessie had given me some messages for her successor, and begged me to talk to her about Mrs. Weir, so that I had to arrange a meeting with her. Strange it was that such duties should fall to my share, but I was, as I had anticipated, necessary just then at Stonecliff. Mrs. Temple could not bear me, but she did not hesitate to make use of me; and as long as Mrs. Weir was quieted by talking to me about the white shawl with the pink border, she put up with my presence. I think she began to feel that she might strain her authority over Mrs. Weir too far. But enough of this; even Mrs. Weir was but secondary at that time.

Mrs. Kemp, like John Hervey, had never congratulated me upon Roger's intended marriage. She did not approve of Jessie Lee well enough to do so. But I think that just at first she had fancied that having Roger with me in England, would make up for any disappointment. A very happy, prosperous, married woman herself, she did not quite picture to herself the vexations that a marriage may bring upon the persons only indirectly concerned in it. Her simple, good sense, would, however, I was sure, understand them the minute they were put before her. Of course I did not intend to speak to her of my own peculiar feeling for Roger. There was no one to whom I could open my heart upon that point, unless,—it may seem strange, but I could have talked to Mrs. Weir, if she had been well enough to listen.

I entered upon my subject immediately with Mrs. Kemp. It was not a pleasant one, so the less delay the better. "I am come," I said, "to consult you about the future. We are

going to begin a new life at Sandcombe, and I should be glad to know how best to carry it out."

"Surely, my dear," said Mrs. Kemp, and she rubbed her spectacles, put them on, and took up her work,—signs that she meant to give me time and attention. "Where is the difficulty?"

"Who is to be mistress?" I said. "Roger thinks there can be two mistresses. I think there can't be."

Mrs. Kemp smiled. "He would not like that there should be two masters, my dear. And I dare say he would quote the Bible to prove that the thing is impossible."

"I dare say he would, but he is very kind, and does not like to hear that I am to be turned out."

"Yet it must come to that, and it seems to me, Ursie, that when a wound is to be made, it is kinder to do it with one cut than with half-a-dozen; but men are very tender-hearted."

"I wish they were not," I replied. "If Roger had come to me at once, and agreed with me how things were to be, he might have been a great help to me. As it is,—trying to make things easy, which can't be easy,—he has left me to bear the burden alone. For I must see all truly," I added.

"Quite right, my dear," and Mrs. Kemp patted my hand approvingly. "As the Farmer sometimes says to me when I grumble, 'Patty, we are to fit our wishes to our circumstances, not our circumstances to our wishes.' If Roger marries, and upsets your household, he must learn to look the change full in the face."

"Or I must," I said; "for I don't expect much from him." I am afraid I said it a little bitterly. Mrs. Kemp thought that I alluded to his choice of a wife, and she answered, "It may turn out better than you expect, my dear. Marriage brings trouble, and if people are good for any thing, trouble brings improvement. Jessie may be a very different person as a wife from what she has been as a girl; though to say she is what I thought Roger would have chosen would be saying what is not true."

"Why did he choose her?" I exclaimed.

"Well, my dear, there may be a good deal said for him.

I don't know that he is different from most other men. Looking upon the world with my old eyes, it often seems to me that women are like the blocks in a barber's shop, which each man dresses up to suit his own fancy. The block may be worth something, or it may not be, it matters little for the time being. What the man falls in love with is not the reality, but the appearance; so it happens that the cleverer, and better, and more kind-hearted a man is in himself, the more danger probably there is of his making a blunder in his choice, because, you see, he has such a charming notion of what a woman ought to be, all ready prepared in his mind, that he has nothing to do but to fit it to the first girl he meets, of a right age, and look, and manner, and there is his perfect wife, ready made."

I sighed. It seemed to me just what Roger had done.

"Jessie isn't like you, my dear," continued Mrs. Kemp.

"No, indeed," I continued. "Dear Mrs. Kemp, I may say it to you, — I could not to any one else, — I have loads of faults, terrible faults; but I do think I have done more for Roger's happiness than Jessie ever will or can do."

"Time will show, my dear," was the reply.

"But," I said, — "please don't think me conceited — I have more sense than Jessie, and I certainly know more of the world, and how to manage; and I believe, too, that I have more fixed principles."

"Excellent qualities, Ursie, my dear, for a sister; but I suppose a man like Roger wants something else in a wife."

"He wants a pretty face," I exclaimed, "and a winning manner."

"Not so much the face as the manner, my dear. Roger is so strong in himself, that he doesn't want any one to make him stronger."

"And I am too strong for him," I replied.

"Perhaps so, my dear. You see you can stand alone, and act for yourself, and form your own opinions, and you have a way of putting them out strongly; and these are very good and *useful qualities in a sister*, or a friend, but they don't suit

all men in a wife, especially not a strong man like Roger, with such a tender heart. What he wants, is something to pet."

It was very true. Roger's tender-heartedness had been his snare.

"Well!" I said, "the deed is done, or all but done: the only thing now is to make the best of it, and I don't think that will be by following Roger's plan and having two mistresses."

"Certainly not, Ursie; at least, so far as I have had any experience. As the Farmer says, whatever you do in life, my dear, take care that you plant your foot upon ground which has a sure foundation; if you don't, before long you will find yourself standing above an earthquake; and there is no sensation more unpleasant, as I have been told."

"But how to manage it?" I said. "Roger won't hear of it, — he was almost angry when last I talked to him. I don't think it will do to insist upon it."

"You can act upon it, my dear, and that will be better than insisting. To insist upon having your own way, seems to me, most times, like giving a man a blow in the face, — he returns it as a matter of course."

"I don't quite understand you," I said.

"It is just this, my dear. If you go to Roger and Jessie, and say that you insist upon Jessie's taking her place as mistress, whether she likes it or not, they will very probably turn round upon you, and think you are in a pet, and they may even complain, and say that it is hard to put upon Jessie duties for which she is not prepared."

"Not prepared?" I exclaimed. "How has she a right to marry if she is not prepared to undertake every duty which her position requires of her?"

"Women do a great many things which they have no right to do, my dear," replied Mrs. Kemp, quietly. "We must take them as they are. Many girls, cleverer than Jessie, go on groping through life, and never discover their duties, except by knocking their heads against them."

"Well!" was my only answer; for I felt cross and disheartened.

"And you see, my dear," continued Mrs. Kemp, "that would be a bad beginning for you all, to quarrel at the outset."

"Then I am to give in," I said.

"Not at all. Only don't raise the question. Take your own view of your position, and act upon it. A person with a fixed purpose has always the advantage over one who trusts to circumstances to work out life."

"It is very droll," I exclaimed, and I could not help laughing a little, "to sit here and talk over with you how to make myself second, when most people would think that my chief wish must be to be first."

"Ah! Ursie, you love truth better than power, and that's why I love you," replied Mrs. Kemp.

"Yes," I said, earnestly; "truth is the one thing I love first, and chiefest, and dearest of all things; let me only have that, and I am satisfied."

"Well, then, the truth of things now is, or will be, that Roger owns Sandcombe, and that Jessie Lee will be his wife; and, in spite of all they may say to the contrary in their good nature, that is the position they are to hold."

"And the position they would wish to hold," I replied; "at least I speak of Jessie. I am quite certain that if I were to put myself in any way above her, she would be up in arms before long."

"To be sure. A girl may be very gentle and humble in her ways of thinking before she is married; but let her once be called Mrs., and notions of her own position come as a matter of course and if she is weak in herself, she is likely to lay an unwise stress upon them. Not but what, as I said before, Jessie may turn out much better in that way, and in others, too, than you and I are inclined to think. We must not be hard upon her."

"I don't wish to be hard," I replied; "but we can't help seeing things, and I had rather not put myself in the way of wounding Jessie upon such a point."

"Right enough. But, I think, my dear, it will all be

tolerably easy, if you go to work carefully. If I were you, I should not make the least fuss about the matter; I should not, for instance, go and tell the servants that they were to consider Jessie their mistress; but I should make a point of always speaking of her as such; in fact, I should take it as a matter of course, and I should consult her about every thing, and make her sit at the head of the table, not because she is mistress, but because she is a married woman; and so, by degrees, you will put her in her true place, and please both her and Roger. For they will be pleased, in spite of all they may say to the contrary, and then you will all be where you ought to be, and therefore be comfortable."

I doubted as to the comfort; but I was sure Mrs. Kemp was right, and, feeling strengthened by her opinion, I turned to other subjects, first Mrs. Weir, and then the preparations for the wedding.

CHAPTER LIII.

I WENT to Hove that day week, shopping with Jessie. Roger drove us in, and then left us to do what we wished in the way of purchases, saying he would be ready for us about half-past five, and we were to meet him at the King's Arms. It was a market day, and Hove was very full. A good many carriages were in the town, besides officers walking about, and the place looked gay. I was not often in Hove, for, as I could not well leave Sandcombe with no one to take my place there, I generally made Mary Kemp do my shopping; but when I did go, I quite enjoyed it. Even on this day, though I must confess that I did not feel very light-hearted, I could find a good deal of amusement in walking about; and Jessie was entirely happy. She had to try on her wedding-dress,—a dove-coloured silk, to be worn with a white muslin mantilla, trimmed with pink, and a white silk bonnet, — and I really did not wonder at the pleasure she seemed to take in twisting and turning before the glass, for any thing prettier I had seldom looked upon.

Then the dressmaker was so civil, and made so much of her, and showed her such a number of pretty things, while she held in her hand a five-pound note, Roger's gift that morning, to be spent upon any thing which took her fancy! Older and wiser heads than hers have been placed in the same position, and felt themselves excited and elated. I did not blame her; only, — if she had not been Roger's intended wife!

We might have had luncheon at a friend's house; but, thinking we should lose time, we agreed to go to the pastry-cook's; and, as Jessie was tired, we sat down in the little inner room to eat our veal patties. A glass partition separated us from the other part of the shop. I sat with my back to it, for I disliked being seen; but Jessie drew her chair so as to be able to look through it, and very amusing remarks she made upon the persons who came in.

"Did you ever see such a bonnet, Ursie? Just look, if it isn't exactly like a coal-scuttle! It must have been made before the flood. And that little gentleman, with the red hair and the moustache! What a pair they are! I hope they won't come in here; I don't think they will. He is talking to such a handsome officer now, — and, — well, I do think that is Mrs. Price just come in. I must go and speak to her."

She started up. I laid my hand upon her arm.

"Jessie, I won't have Mrs. Price brought here."

I am afraid my tone was angry. Jessie sat down, and was silent; but she laid down her knife and fork, and gazed through the glass.

"Do turn away," I said, "they will see you."

"I can't help it if they do," replied Jessie, in a tone of annoyance. "If we have luncheon in a public shop, we must take our chance."

"They won't stay long," I said; "they are only buying sugar-plums for her little nephew; and you know it would be very awkward for me to see Mrs. Price, because I have never returned her visit."

"She wouldn't mind that; she is not at all particular," said Jessie. "She has been so kind to me, Ursie, I can't give up

the acquaintance, so you had better speak to her at once, for you will be obliged to do so before long."

There was truth in this suggestion, but it did not make me feel more amicably towards Mrs. Price to discover that the intimacy which I had so long striven to avoid, might be forced upon me by Jessie's marriage.

Jessie took my silence, I suppose, for assent and approval, for without saying any thing more, she suddenly walked into the outer shop. Mrs. Price started; there was no great cordiality in her manner.

"Jessie, my dear, you here? What a wonder! Where did you come from?" She looked at the officer, then at Jessie, hesitating, I thought, whether she should introduce them to each other; and Jessie looked also, and seemed to expect it, — but Mrs. Price apparently determined against it. She said something to Jessie in an under-tone, which I could not hear, and I saw Jessie change colour. I suppose it was on account of an allusion to her marriage.

"You have taken us by surprise," I heard Mrs. Price say, and Jessie made a low, timid answer. Mrs. Price drew her nearer to the inner shop, and away from the rest of the party.

"I have friends here, you see," continued Mrs. Price; "but it is no use to trouble you with introductions. You have taken a different line."

"I hoped we should always be friends," I heard Jessie say.

"Oh yes; friends of course. But a married woman, — it will be quite different: — in short, I am disappointed, Jessie, and you know I have reason to be." Mrs. Price spoke with the tone and manner of wounded affection. Jessie's eyes were raised to her with a look of wonder and vexation.

"I don't mean to be severe, my dear," continued Mrs. Price, "but really, after the opportunities I have given you, — the advantages you have had, — and knowing as you must know, — but I won't talk of that. Poor fellow! his fate is a hard one."

I just heard Jessie say, "I did not think he would care," and then I walked forward and presented myself before them.

Jessie's countenance expressed relief; Mrs. Price's pride. I spoke as though the meeting was accidental and indifferent, asked after her husband, and made an observation upon the weather, and then begged Jessie to finish her luncheon, for we had still a good deal of shopping to do.

"Pay for us, will you?" said Jessie, "whilst I eat my patty."

"Yes, but I think I left my gloves on the table," I said, making an excuse that I might not leave her alone again with Mrs. Price; and I went back with her to the inner room. I lingered there, watching till Mrs. Price should leave the shop, but she was now engaged with the little spoilt boy, who could not make up his mind what lozenges he liked. I saw there was no hope of being rid of her, and as Jessie's luncheon was ended we went back again. I had the money ready in my hand, that we might not be detained, and I stood between Mrs. Price and Jessie, laid the sum on the counter, and turning round directly, saw Mrs. Price slip a note into Jessie's hand, and heard her say, in a low voice, "You will see it has been a hard matter to say good-bye."

Jessie's colour was crimson one moment, the next she became perfectly white. She hurried out of the shop without another word. We went across the street to a stationer's to buy some paper. Then, whilst I was choosing what I wanted, I observed her take up a book under pretence of looking at it, and slipping the note between the leaves, read it, as I suppose she imagined, unperceived. After that she seemed quite to have recovered herself, and we finished the remainder of our business quickly, and at half-past five met Roger and were driven back again to Sandcombe.

As I sat in the back seat of the chaise, I pondered many things in my mind; most especially how far one could be at liberty to found uncomfortable suspicions upon mere trifles. The result of my deliberations I communicated to Jessie when I followed her that night to her room.

I began at once. "Jessie, I have something upon my mind. You know I am always outspoken, so you must let me be so

now. I don't like Mrs. Price, and I don't like what she said to you in the shop to-day. I could not help hearing it."

"I don't like her as I used to do," replied Jessie. "I felt to-day, Ursie, that you were right about her, and that I was wrong."

"I am glad of that," I continued. "She is under-hand, and I think she might lead you into mischief if you were to see much of her."

"I am sure of it, and I don't mean to see much of her," replied Jessie.

I paused — and thought of the note. "You don't intend to keep up any thing like a correspondence with her, of course, then," I ventured to say.

"Oh dear no! We have never written to each other except about little matters of business."

Surely that was enough to satisfy me — yet I added one caution more.

"I shall be glad when you have learnt to like only those whom Roger approves of. He could never like Mrs. Price."

"He told me so, this evening," she replied. "Indeed, Ursie, I quite feel with him."

I could but kiss her, and tell her that if she was guided by her husband, she would go safely and happily through life, and with a lighter heart I went down stairs to say a few words to Roger.

We discussed the affairs of the day; the purchases and orders, the wedding guests, the household arrangements. Just as we had finished, he said to me, "I have had such a charming talk with Jessie to-night, Trot. I wish you could have heard it. She is so simple, just like a child, and yet with such capital good sense. She quite sees all that you and I see in Mrs. Price."

"I think she does," I replied. "She said as much to me just now, and I am very glad, Roger, that she can talk out to you about every thing."

"I don't believe she has a thought kept back," he replied. "Even about that stupid Lieutenant Macdonald she came out

freely, though some girls might have been shy. I don't know why I should call him stupid, though," he added, laughing, "as I am sure I never had any cause to be jealous."

"It was a silly business," I said, though feeling greatly relieved; "Mrs. Price was at the bottom of it. She grows worse and worse to me. I can bear with her when she forgets herself, but when she puts on the fine lady, as she did to-day, I have scarcely patience to look at her."

"She is odious," he exlaimed. "Did Jessie look very sweet in her wedding dress? I want her to let me see her in it before the day."

"We won't forestall pleasure," I said; "at any rate, Roger, you may be satisfied with having a very pretty wife."

"And a very good one, Ursie," — and he became suddenly grave. "I am not quite such a fool as I seem, though when I look at her" — he stopped short and then added: "if I did not think that my choice was good in God's sight, I could give her up even now."

Fears, suspicions, warning! where could they be after that speech? I went to bed, and to sleep.

CHAPTER LIV.

The twelfth of June was as brilliant a day as ever dawned upon this fallen earth. If it is pictured in my memory in shades of darkness, the fault is mine and mine alone. I could scarcely have had more than four hours' sleep the night before. I went to bed very late, and I was up again soon after sunrise. Even now I can recall the soft beauty of the morning mists floating over St. Anne's; the glittering of the dew on the turf, the clear song of the birds, and the fresh scent of the warm air passing over the down. And I was with Roger at Sandcombe; the home of my infancy. I was to live with him there for years, — for life, if so I willed. The prayer I had often made was granted, but so as to be my trial, not my joy.

We were to be a small party. Mary Kemp and I were to

be the bridesmaids, and Mrs. Kemp had promised to come over early to help me with the preparations for breakfast. Some of our friends were to meet us at Compton Church, and come back with us, and after breakfast Roger and Jessie were to drive into Hove, and take a fly from thence to a small village, a kind of watering place, about ten miles off. Roger meant to take Jessie to London afterwards, but he wished to have a little quiet with her first. So the day was mapped out. There was so much household business to be attended to, that I could not dress myself for the wedding at once, but I put on my common gown, and went down stairs to help Martha, and look to the poultry and the dairy just as usual. There was nothing to make me feel the change that was coming upon me, except the weight at my heart, and the sight of the chairs put in order against the great, round dining-table in the large parlour. That had been done the night before; Roger and Jessie had helped place them, and had passed many jokes as to where every one should sit. Their voices seemed still to linger in the empty room.

About half-past seven I went up to help Jessie, but she was not ready for me, and I strolled out into the garden to gather some flowers for her to put in her dress. Roger was there before me for the same purpose. He greeted me tenderly, so indeed as I can never forget, and we took a turn round the garden together; but we neither of us seemed to know what to say to each other, and when he had put his flowers together, he said he would take them up to Jessie himself, and he went away and left me.

Then William came out, groping rather than walking, for his eyes were failing him almost entirely. I could not let him be alone, and I joined him. He was afraid that we should be late, and he complained of Jessie's want of punctuality, and said he was sure she would drive Roger frantic if she went on so, and at last he became so fidgety that I was obliged to go in to hasten Jessie. I found her standing before the glass, with her dress on, ready to be fastened. When I gazed upon her, so young, fresh, lovely, and loving, a spring of fondness

welled up, as it were, from the depths of my heart, and, as I kissed her, I whispered, "Oh! Jessie, you look as though you would make Roger happy, and I am sure he will make you so."

She turned her soft eyes upon me earnestly. "Do you think I can make him happy, Ursie? I am afraid he may have made a mistake."

I smiled. "It is too late to think of that," I said; "he must take his chance."

Still she was grave. Instead of moving so that I might dress her, she went on: "He thinks better of me than he should. Ursie, have you told him all my faults?"

"He has known you long enough to find them out," I answered. "At any rate they must be left for the present. William will be so vexed if we don't go down."

"Mrs. Temple would give me a worse character than I give myself," persisted Jessie.

I became a little impatient and answered: "Dear Jessie, you have chosen the worst moment possible for such a subject. You should have made your confessions before."

"It came over me last night," she said. "I couldn't sleep. But, Ursie, I love him dearly. That is the chief thing, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed, it is all he asks now, except confidence."

"I told him about Mr. Macdonald," she said, "all I could. I think he understands."

"If he doesn't, you must make him. There is nothing in it to pain him."

"Oh, nothing! nothing! It was all folly. I am ready now: please dress me. I am so glad you say it is nothing."

Her face brightened into its usual light-hearted expression. She made me fasten her mantilla with the gold brooch, which was William's gift; and clasp the hair bracelet, which was mine; and then with a merry step she ran to the head of the stairs, returning to say, — "Ursie, you are to be my wisdom, Roger declares, and I am to do every thing you tell me."

I was pleased. I don't think I knew then how little human

wisdom can aid in a struggle with the temptations of a sinful heart.

The farmer and Mrs. Kemp, Mary, and John Hervey arrived just as Jessie was ready. They came over in the farmer's double chaise. I was very glad to have them all with me; they took off much of the duty of being in good spirits, — the most trying duty a person can have to perform; and I left William, and the farmer, and John to have their jokes, whilst I went with Mrs. Kemp and Mary to show them how we had arranged for the party after church. Mrs. Kemp had brought over some sweet things in the chaise, — jelly and blanc-mange, which she and Mary had made for me. I was quite satisfied with the look of the breakfast when it was laid out. Roger lingered about by himself, for Jessie was gone up stairs. We were expecting the fly every minute. I longed to be with him, and yet I was afraid. At last I did summon courage, and I went and said, with a little laugh, as I put my hand on his shoulder, "Are you very impatient? We can't have many minutes to wait."

He turned round to me quietly, and said, "People are not impatient, Ursie, when they are quite satisfied."

There was no room for sympathy, and I moved away.

He was the only man I ever saw who did not look scared on his wedding day.

We drove to church, — Jessie, Mrs. Kemp, Mary, and I in the fly; and Roger, William, the farmer, and John in the chaise. The country people had collected in the churchyard, and many were in the church. Farmer Kemp led Jessie up the aisle, and placed her before the altar by Roger's side.

It had all been a dream to me till then. Mr. Richardson's voice, as he addressed the congregation, telling them wherefore they were met together, — even "to join together this man and this woman in holy Matrimony," was the first sound which awoke me to a sense of reality.

No marvel that Roger was grave. There is but one thing more awful than marriage, — and that is death.

It was but a short service, performed without blunder or

hesitation; Jessie's voice never failed her; and Roger, as he grasped the small hand so lovingly given him, vowed unfalteringly, with all the honest fulness of his heart, to take Jessie for his "wedded wife, to have, and to hold, to love, and to cherish, till death." The ring was placed upon her finger, the prayer offered for the performance of that solemn covenant, and they were joined together, and no man could put them asunder.

The words which made them one were the same which, in the secrecy of my heart, I knew must make Roger and myself *two*.

It was a bitter consciousness, but it was to be put away from me now for ever. I trust and believe there was no trace of it in the kiss which I gave Jessie when Roger brought her up to me and said, "She is your sister." I know I resolved that, through God's help, there should be none thenceforth, in thought, or word, or deed. A considerable bustle and confusion took place when we left the church. Our friends, who were to be at the breakfast, came up to offer their congratulations, and when Roger and Jessie went off in the fly, arrangements were to be made to carry back Mary Kemp and me, as there was only one vacant place for Mrs. Kemp in the chaise. I wished, and had settled to walk, but no one would hear of it, and at last Mr. Richardson insisted upon it that we should have his little pony-chaise, and John Hervey offered to drive us. I don't know quite how it was, but just as we were setting off the farmer called out to Mary that there was a place for her now in the chaise; and as we had all been running to and fro like hunted sheep, Mary jumped in, and John Hervey and I were left behind. I was sorry for the moment, but I did not care much about it. I did not care for any thing, indeed, except silence, and that I knew John Hervey would understand. I don't think we spoke half a dozen words all the way home; but when he helped me out of the chaise, he said, "Marriages are trying things, Ursie; one doesn't know whether one's foot is on land or water."

"I know where mine is," I said, hastily; "on water." He

grasped hold of my hand kindly, and I could almost have said there were tears in his eyes.

"It is very wrong in me," I exclaimed. "I ought not to have said it, but you will forget it."

"If I can. But things often turn out better, Ursie, than we expect."

"And if they turn out worse, there is no use in dwelling upon them," I said. "Now, Mr. Hervey, we are going to be very merry." And I ran away from him, went up stairs, set myself in order, — by a short prayer and a deluge of cold water to my face, — and then reappeared, to be the cheerful, attentive, happy hostess of the party at Roger's wedding breakfast.

Nothing can be more same than weddings. I have already described William and Leah's; and there was an oppressive phantom-like feeling of repetition in all that went on on the occasion of Roger's marriage. Healths were drunk and speeches made; and many of the persons present were those who had congratulated Leah Morris on the pleasant prospects before her when she became the mistress of Sandcombe. If it had not been for a glance at poor William's helpless movements, and the sight of Jessie's pretty little face, turned so sweetly upon Roger, and smiling and blushing with surprise whenever she was addressed as Mrs. Grant, I could almost have believed that Time had flowed backwards. Almost, not quite; when I had leisure to think of myself, the weight at my heart told me what a burden of experience and thought Time had brought, as it had borne me onwards.

Roger and Jessie did not leave us till late in the afternoon: that helped the day very much. Roger's thoughtfulness was greater than I can describe. He seemed to understand exactly all the little things which might trouble me when I was left alone to manage every thing for every one by myself; and he and John Hervey made arrangements about the wine for the evening, and the supper for the men who were attending to the horses, and settled, in fact, a number of things which would never have entered my head, but which would have

perplexed me if they had taken me unawares. For the time I seemed to be more in Roger's thoughts than Jessie, who was finishing the packing, with Mary Kemp to help her. He was so like what he ever had been, I could not think why I felt any difference, till some one came up to him laughing, and said, "Mr. Grant, your wife wants you." The smile that stole over his face then made me walk away and mix with the guests, fidget about Jessie, and keep myself in a continual bustle till the fly drove up to the door, the luggage was put in, and — they were gone. How I talked and laughed that evening, and did every thing, indeed, like every body else, except eat and drink, I cannot imagine, now that I look back; but I know that I was told it was delightful to see me enjoy myself, and I believe there might even have been something like enjoyment in the excitement of feeling which forced me to exert myself. But the reaction came. When the wedding-guests were gone — when Farmer Kemp had given me his parting salute on both cheeks, and Mrs. Kemp and Mary had said their affectionate good-bye, and John Hervey had offered me a quiet shake of the hand, which did not want words, and I was left alone with William, and his irritable fatigue, and the burnt-up candles, and the empty glasses, and the disarranged chairs — who shall wonder that I stole up to my room and cried bitterly?

CHAPTER LV.

For three weeks longer I was to be the undisturbed mistress of Sandcombe. The days were sufficiently occupied in preparing for the time when my authority was to be shared, if not entirely surrendered. I cannot say that the prospect was pleasant, little as I fancied I loved power. According to the old proverb, "The value of any thing is never known till it is lost;" and I had not till this time been aware how much my comfort had been increased, latterly, by having no one to dispute my will in little domestic matters. Mrs. Kemp's ad-

vice I knew to be wise, but it was not easy to bring myself to act upon it. I could have resigned my office at once formally, and found some satisfaction in the sense of freedom which would follow. But to have all the labour and responsibility, and compel another to take the dignity of power, was trying to human nature, and especially such a nature as mine—hasty and resolute, able to undertake great works, or practise great self-denials, but fretting against petty restraints, and peculiarly irritated by the difficulties involved in the untruthfulness of a false position. Happily, however, I had no leisure to forestall evils. Between William, and the farm, and the kitchen, I was incessantly occupied, and had only time to go over to Stonecliff once, to inquire for Mrs. Weir. The visit was unsatisfactory. Mrs. Temple made many complaints of the new attendant, and seemed to think that I was answerable for faults, because I had first mentioned her name. She did not allow me to see Mrs. Weir alone, and before I departed hinted that great changes might soon be expected. "Mr. Temple thought of letting Stonecliff for a time; perhaps they might remove from it altogether. Of course, wherever they went Mrs. Weir would go also. She could not live without them." I made no observation at the time, but when I returned home, without asking advice of any one, I wrote a letter to Miss Milicent. It was a strong measure to take, but I felt it to be necessary. For Mrs. Weir to be dragged about wherever Mrs. Temple chose to carry her, and with no one to be a check upon her, seemed to be not only cruel but dangerous, in the poor lady's present state. If any thing could bring Miss Milicent to see her duties in a straightforward way, I thought it might be such a plan as this.

I was waiting for the answer to the letter when the day arrived on which Roger and Jessie were expected home. We had sent the chaise into Hove for them, and they were to be with us about six o'clock, in time for tea, which was put ready for them in the little parlour. I had gathered some flowers to make the room look fresh and pretty, and made some tea-cakes which I knew Jessie was particularly fond of. I pleased

myself with thinking that Roger would like these little attentions, and as I waited at the garden gate, looking up the lane by which they would come, I almost believed that I was anticipating the meeting with pleasure. It was a glorious evening, warm and yet fresh, the very feeling of life was enjoyment; and even William, who came in about this time from the farm, and joined me, seemed to regain his spirits unter its influence. He leaned over the gate, straining his poor dim eyes, and being almost certain he heard them coming, whilst he talked to me of the comfort of having Roger with us, and praised Jessie for her thoughtfulness in having written often; and it did me good to hear him. His was a much more thankful, contented mind than it used to be.

"There they are, I am sure those are the wheels now, Ursie," he exclaimed. "They are at the top of the lane;—hark! don't you hear?"

No, I heard nothing but the noises of the men with the cows and horses in the farm-yard. But William's ear was sharper than mine. He was right. A turn in the lane had hid them from us; but in a few seconds the chaise was seen, coming slowly down the hill. William threw open the gate and went out.

"Hollo! stop! what are you going round there for?"

Roger was driving the chaise into the yard, but he drew up, and jumped out, and before speaking to us turned round to help Jessie.

"Well! my good fellow! welcome home again. And, Jessie, I may have a kiss now," and William seized Roger's hand, whilst he kissed Jessie, and then shook both their hands again, scarcely able to express his delight.

"Trot! my little Trot!" Roger disengaged himself from William, and gave me a *bear's hug*, and then stood aside whilst I welcomed Jessie. "How are you, dear Jessie? Are you very tired? Have you had a long journey? You must want your tea. It is quite ready for you." The words were cold to my own ears, I hope they were not so to hers. We

went in at the garden gate. Jessie put her arm within Roger's, and went first, William and I walked behind.

"She is a little tired," said Roger, turning round to me as we went in doors. "We had such a day of business and sight-seeing yesterday, but we were determined to see every thing. To-night she must go to bed early and have a good rest."

"As early as she likes," I said, "only we will give her some tea first. I am afraid, Jessie, you won't find every thing quite comfortable in your own room. I thought the new chest of drawers would have been sent to-day, but that stupid Thompson at Hove has disappointed me."

"Never mind, we don't care for chests of drawers, do we, love?" said Roger, "Home is the thing. Run up stairs and take off your things, and then come down to tea. And, Ursie, if you will just not let her unpack her boxes to-night. What are you burdening yourself with that for?" he added, as Jessie took a large brown-paper parcel in her hand; "all you will want now will be the small carpet-bag." Jessie said there was something particular in the parcel, she must have it, and Roger then took it from her, and went up stairs with it. He had left the carpet-bag, and as it was small I carried it up myself.

"If you will rest it here, Ursie," said Roger, pointing to a chair, but not offering to lift the bag, "I can unlock it, for I have the keys. I wouldn't trust her with them," he added, laughing.

"How pretty the flowers are," said Jessie; "and how pleasant and bright the room looks, Ursie; you must have taken a great deal of trouble about it."

Roger gave me a kindly smile; "She is a good little Trot," he said. "The flowers are not quite so grand, Jessie, as those we saw in London, are they? Such a sight, Ursie, in Covent Garden! I took Jessie there quite early; but she will tell you all about it, all we have seen and done. A capital traveller she makes, and she remembers every thing."

"Ursie, dear, you look tired," said Jessie, when Roger

went away; "I am afraid you have been working too hard for us."

I did feel very tired, but I evaded an answer. I don't think I felt inclined for pity, and I went down stairs.

"The place of honour for you, Jessie," said William, as he drew out an arm-chair for her, when she entered the room; Jessie placed herself in it at once. "She does not look much the worse for her fatigue, does she?" said Roger, gazing at her with a satisfaction which he did not endeavour to conceal. "That gown is the one Mrs. Kemp gave you, love, is it not? You must tell her how useful it has been," and he stretched out his hand and smoothed down the frills, — an action which I could find no fault with, but which gave me a most uncomfortable sensation.

"By the bye, I have some news to tell you about Mary Kemp," said Jessie; "we heard it in the waiting-room to-day, just as we were starting."

"About John Hervey, rather," said Roger; "that old uncle of his is dead at last, and has left him five thousand pounds, to say the least."

"Of course he will make up to Mary Kemp at once," said Jessie.

"I am not so sure of that," I replied. "They go on very oddly, and I know they are not engaged, for Mrs. Kemp told me so herself. She only thinks they like each other."

"And you have never said any thing to Mary?" asked Jessie.

"No; how could I? If she was not engaged, how could I ask her whether she cared for him?"

"I should have found it out somehow," said Jessie. "I always thought there was a regular engagement."

"Women can't understand waiting and fearing," said Roger; and he laughed.

"It is the fact of there being no engagement which puzzles me," I said. "Mary is the last person to let a man dangle on, paying her attentions without coming to any conclusion. She has no vanity in her."

"That is saying more than I would say for any woman," observed William.

"I don't know that women are more vain than men," said Roger; "and if they are, they have more cause to be, haven't they, Jessie?"

Jessie laughed, and blushed, and gave no direct answer, merely remarking that Mary Kemp was better than most people.

"I think you must know more about the affair between her and Mr. Hervey than any one else," I said, addressing her; "for I remember it was you who set the rumour afloat, and I have all along half-credited it, because you told me it was so."

"Mrs. Price, not I," said Jessie. "She is given to gossip, and she always declared they would marry."

"Time will show if we wait long enough," observed Roger, "and in the mean season we will give them both our best wishes. Jessie, love, you are not eating any thing. Have some more tea-cake, this is just the kind you like."

Jessie helped herself to a small piece, but Roger insisted upon her taking what was left, which was little enough. William and he never touched such things, he said, and as I had made the cakes, I was likely to have had enough of them, so the chief duty devolved upon her.

My face was nearly hidden by the urn. Jessie peeped round it and said, "He is very unfair upon you, Ursie. I don't at all see why having made the cakes to please me, which I am sure you did, you are not to enjoy them; do have some."

I shook my head, and murmured something; but I did not venture to do more, and making an excuse to fetch some sugar, I left the room. Turning into the large parlour, I put down the candle upon the table, closed the door, and walked up and down the room.

To be vexed about such trifles! to care for Roger's not *offering me* a piece of cake, or letting me carry a carpet-bag, *or omitting to* notice my flowers. I could not have believed it

was in me. And to be irritated with Jessie, and her little kind thoughtfulness; — it was actually mean. Did I indeed so dearly love power, that I could not submit to common civility from her, because I had hitherto considered it my place to show, rather than to receive attention? But it was not power that I cared for, I felt sure it was not; if Roger had only recognised that I had worked for him; if he had only said that he knew I had done all to please him, I hoped I should have been satisfied. But he was engrossed with his one object, and what could I expect? Jessie's thanks and attentions were galling, because he was silent.

I could not comfort myself, I could not even set myself right by owning that I was quite wrong. The feelings were so mixed. They were selfish and unjust, and yet not without cause. I waited for a few minutes, just sufficient to recover my composure, and then with a hard feeling of endurance, under which lay a quick irritability, ready to spring forth at the least provocation, I returned to my place at the tea-table. I had not been missed. Roger was giving an account of his London experiences, and calling upon Jessie to corroborate them, and she was adding little comments and anecdotes, which helped to amuse William, and made our evening brighter than it had been since she left us. They talked fast and merrily, and seemed satisfied with my attention, as I now and then added a word, whilst I helped the servant carry away the tea-things, and then went to look after some other household matters.

It must have been merely a fancy of Roger's, that Jessie was tired; she chattered on as though she had only just risen from a good night's rest, and moved about quite briskly. A little while before prayers, for instance, Roger was telling us something about an exhibition they had seen, and wishing he had a book that he had bought, which described it; he said he was too lazy to go and search for it.

Jessie started up in a moment. "I will go; let me go, Roger, I know just where it is."

He smiled kindly upon her. "No, love, I can't let you trouble yourself; we will look at it to-morrow."

"Let me go," I said; "where shall I find it?"

"I can't describe where, exactly," said Jessie; "though I can guess, for I packed all his things myself. I suspect it is hidden with some other treasures between your second-best coat and your wedding waistcoat, Roger," she added laughing, as against his orders, she ran up stairs.

I sat down again wondering at the change which had come over the world, and which had transformed the shy, respectful Jessie Lee, scarcely able to look upon Mr. Roger without awe, into the attentive, but free and merry little wife. She came down again, bringing with her the book, and also a note, which Martha had just given her for Roger from Mr. Stewart of Hatton.

"What is there in it?" she said, and she peeped over his shoulder.

He smiled and held it for her to read. "Nothing of consequence, you see. I will go over some day soon." He put the letter in his pocket, and went on talking about the exhibition.

If I felt chilled and jarred, perhaps I may be excused, when it is remembered that hitherto I had been the petted and privileged person to whom Roger turned on every occasion, and that now I could not consider myself at liberty to go to his room, or inquire the contents of a note, without something like an apology.

Yet Jessie was right in all she did: that was the greatest grievance of all, for if so, surely I must be wrong.

The first week of Jessie's return was unsettled. She had her things to unpack, and Roger was coming to her upon one excuse or another every hour, taking her with him to see this, or give an opinion upon that. He did not put me aside, but he was continually *remembering* me, and this must always be painful to one who has been accustomed to be *thought* of. We had a good many visitors, and wine was handed round, and wedding cake eaten; and Jessie looked very pretty, and be-

haved very pleasantly. She seemed quite in her best silk dress to receive the congratulations, and I felt myself in mine as I waited upon every one. If I could only keep her a doll, and work for her, my task would be easy. But Mrs. Kemp's admonitions sounded in my ears, and as many days went by, and the excitement of the return went off, I felt that we must all face our new positions, and follow out life accordingly. And how to begin? I made my first effort on a baking day. We were very busy as usual, but I heard something about a drive for Jessie in the afternoon, and I knew that she was up stairs doing something to her dress in preparation for it.

I sent Esther Smithson to her, to ask if she would be home late, and whether Jane, our little school-girl, was to be kept to help clean up the kitchen.

Esther brought me back word, that if I would just settle the matter, Mrs. Grant would be obliged. It was uncertain how late she should be.

Upon this, I went up to Jessie, and found her at her work, and as it happened, Roger with her. He had come in from the farm only a few minutes before.

"What do you want, Trot?" he said cheerfully, as I entered the room. "She is a bird of ill omen, Jessie, isn't she? always full of business."

"Mine is an easy business, for once in a way," I said. "I only want to make Jessie say what she wishes."

"Any thing that you wish, Ursie, I am sure," said Jessie. "You know a great deal better than I do. Do you think, Roger, we shall have time to go round by Stonecliff, if we set off at half-past three?"

"We will try," he said; "I know you have set your heart upon going to Mrs. Weir."

"If you do go that way," I said, "you might just stop and see little Jane's mother, and talk to her about the child's coming earlier in the mornings."

"If we pass the cottage, we can," answered Jessie; "but I am not sure that we shall go that road."

"What is little Trot thinking of?" said Roger, patting

me on the shoulder, and noticing, as I suppose, my grave face.

"Only," I said, lightly, "that if Mrs. Grant does not give her own orders, people won't understand that they are bound to obey them."

"Mrs. Grant has such an excellent substitute," said Jessie, laughing. "She does not want to give orders. Why, Ursie, you know twenty times more about housekeeping than I do."

"Then isn't it time you should learn?" I said.

"She will learn from you," said Roger, quickly, "she can't have a better teacher. You know I told you, Ursie, that no one wanted to turn you out of your place."

"But I may wish to vacate it," I said, and then observing that Roger and Jessie both looked rather uncomfortable, I added, "At any rate, I don't wish to fill it entirely by myself; so, Jessie, dear, do tell me how long you think we shall be out this afternoon, and whether you would wish us to keep Jane."

"I suppose she may as well stay," said Jessie, "if you think it necessary."

"There is a good deal to do," I said, "because of the baking."

"Oh! yes, I forgot. How stupid of me; I ought not to have fixed my drive for to-day! But now it is all arranged. I suppose it does not very much signify."

"Not much. Will you remember to tell Jane's mother what you have to complain of?"

"If I don't forget, I will, certainly; and, Ursie, will you and William try to settle a day for a party? People are asking me out so, I must have them here in return, mustn't I, Roger?"

He smiled an assent, and Jessie, who had left her work to talk to me, went on with it diligently.

Roger followed me as I went away. "You are vexed, Ursie, about something; what is it?"

"Nothing, nothing," was my answer.

"Nothing has no meaning; I must know."

"Nothing that you can remedy; or at least that you will remedy," I said.

"Then you think me very much altered. I always have wished to remedy what you found fault with."

"Not altered, Roger. Oh! no, it was what I ought to have known;" but I felt myself becoming mysterious, and knew that would make me irritating, so I burst through all reserve and prudence, and added, "I am afraid you are going the way to spoil Jessie." For almost the first time in his life, I saw him look proud and hurt.

"That is a grave charge," he said. "I don't quite perceive what reason you have to make it."

"If you make a doll of her," I said, "you must spoil her."

"Making a doll of her, I suppose, means making her useless. She is scarcely that, for she is always busy."

"Yes, with her own concerns, and I don't mean to say that she does not help me when I ask her."

"And when you don't ask her," he said. "She has taken upon herself entirely the duty of waiting upon William."

"Because she likes reading aloud," was on my lips; but I would not say it, for it would have annoyed him, so I answered, "People speak of her as the mistress of Sandcombe, and therefore it is right that she should attend to the duties."

He misunderstood me completely, my ill-concealed irritation misled him as to my feelings, and he replied, "Nobody wishes to take power from you, Ursie; Jessie least of all."

"Of course, of course not, — I don't think of such a thing; — Roger, why can't you understand?"

"Because you create difficulties where there are none," he replied; "Jessie is willing to make a slave of herself, if it is needed. She will work herself to death if I will let her. All she wants is just to be told what to do; and, Ursie, I have quite depended upon you for that."

Quite right — quite true! but there was a falsity at the bottom; and I could not make him see it. Jessie went for her drive, saw Mrs. Weir, called upon little Jane's mother, came

home and told me of it, as if she had done a meritorious deed, — then helped me in the kitchen, read to William; and because I asked her to do it, hemmed table-cloths after tea, and went to bed thinking, I am sure, that she had done me a favour, and sacrificed herself to assist me in my duties.

CHAPTER LVI.

My letter from Miss Milicent came, though not till after considerable delay. I opened it anxiously, prepared to be provoked if it were only by Miss Milicent's scrawling letters upon the thin foreign paper.

"Dear Ursie Grant,

"I received your letter a fortnight ago. I should have answered it before if I had known what to say. Matilda Temple is doing just what I thought she would; I can't think why my mother submits.

"If you were to tell her that you think it bad for my mother to go away, perhaps she would be frightened and stay where she is, for she does not like you, and thinks you speak your mind. As to my coming home, I should do no good if I was there, for my mother never listens to me, and Matilda Temple and I can't help quarrelling. My father and I are going into Normandy soon, he has some business there. If I come home at all it must be to get some money, for no one sends me any. I am sorry your brother Roger has married Jessie Lee. I thought he was a wiser man. I never had a sister-in-law, so I don't know how I should like one. I am glad you have taken to seeing my mother oftener. She likes you better than most people, and you understand her whimsies. I should like to hear about the school-children at Compton. This is a strange place, the people's ways are so odd. As I don't go to their churches, I feel very like a heathen.

"My father is out a good deal, and I only know a few

persons, but it will be pleasant enough going into Normandy. I wish, if you hear of any one coming to France, you would send me a pair of stout boots, such as the shoemaker at Hatton used to make for me. I can't get such here. Paris is a very flimsy place. I have great trust in you, Ursie Grant, and am sure that you will manage best in keeping my mother near you.

"I am glad you wrote to me, for I don't often hear any Compton news.

"Your sincere Friend,
"MILICENT WEIR."

Did all the world do their duty by deputy? That was almost my first thought, when I had finished Miss Milicent's letter. Such a quiet way of setting a claim aside, and letting it fall upon another, was so startling that, really, it was enough to make me think I was under a mistake — and that Miss Milicent was not bound to come home and take care of her mother, but might rightly leave all to me.

Persons who have a clear eye to their duties lay themselves open, I have observed, to much more blame from the world than those who turn away and don't appear to see them. The standard we set up for ourselves is that which, for the most part, people expect us to follow. As, for instance, when a man is indolent, or extravagant, or selfish, it is commonly said, "Oh! yes, but what can you expect from such a man?" As if the faults which he permitted to himself were his excuse. I found this even with regard to Miss Milicent. I believe Mrs. Kemp and myself were almost the only persons who had not learned to say, "Well! she is so odd and so wilful, that it does not much signify. She must go her own way, for she will never go any other person's." And I know I was thought uncharitable, when I saw that the fact of her not being able to be of use to her mother was a fault, and could never be an excuse for remaining away. In this free country of England, we are, upon the whole, willing to let every one be what he chooses, so long as he gives notice of it, that

others may not come in his way. But England is not Heaven, and we English people are not angels, and I suppose the judgment of the angels in Heaven may be somewhat different from ours. I was wrong, though, in saying that Mrs. Kemp and myself were the only persons, there was one other — John Hervey; and I had an opportunity of talking to him upon the matter soon after receiving Miss Milicent's letter. He was less at Sandcombe than he used to be, and when he did come we said but little to each other. Though I felt he understood my disappointment about Roger, I could not talk of it, and he was just so intimate that there was no choice between keeping on the surface of all things, or going deep into them. Mrs. Weir, however, was neutral ground, and I was pleased to have his sympathy, and pleased too to hear a little about the money that had been left him, and to sound him about Mary Kemp. His feeling for her was a real perplexity to me. Like her I was sure he did, and she liked him. They were excellent friends and cousins, and quite at home with each other. Only too much so, I thought, for any thing more serious. The world, however, had so long set it down that they were to be married, it was difficult to rid oneself of the impression. The time when I had the longest talk with him was one day when he came over to dine, and was to ride into Hove with Roger afterwards. I saw him by myself before dinner, and showed him Miss Milicent's letter, about which he felt as I did, and said that I ought not to give in so easily, but should make another effort to put her duty plainly before her. Mrs. Weir would no doubt be pleased to have her home again, and this new plan of Mrs. Temple's was just the opportunity for breaking up the joint household, and settling Mrs. Weir again in a home of her own. I asked him whether Miss Milicent was at all necessary to her father, but he said that from all he could learn she did more harm than good to Mr. Weir, for she encouraged his schemes, which were fast leading him into difficulties abroad, as they had done in England; and having her with him was an excuse for living in an expensive part of the town, and seeing more company than he

ought. Moreover he was always falling back upon his daughter's money, and making her write urgent letters for remittances, to which he could have no right except on her account, and which prevented Mrs. Weir from putting by any thing to pay his old debts as she much wished to do.

"Altogether, Ursie," concluded Mr. Hervey, "the case is not such a perplexing one as people choose to think; and though it would startle folks to hear me say it, I believe it would be settled more justly in God's sight by a calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence, than by any talk about right and wrong, and conflicting claims, which are only determined by every one's own fancy."

"People don't like pounds, shillings, and pence," I said; "it is such a mean way of arranging things."

"Very true," he replied. "But, Ursie, isn't it mean because we choose to make it so? After all, there must be some great use and intention in a thing which has such an enormous influence in the world as money; it can't be only a snare. And sometimes when I think, — which you know," he added, laughing, "I only do now and then for a change, — but when I do think, it seems to me that money is the representative of many chief virtues, — justice, and generosity, and selfdenial, — and that if a man could, through God's help, keep himself quite straight with regard to it, he would travel fast and far on the road to perfection; whilst a fault with regard to it seems to me, in like manner, to be no trifle, but a deep, fundamental flaw at the root of a person's character, which there are ten chances to one will in the end lead him quite astray."

He was right, I felt, and I could have talked more to him, only dinner was ready. I gained a new notion of him from that conversation, more like what I used to have of Roger. He was not apt to come out with thoughts, though he was very quick, and shrewd, and infinitely good-natured. One thing I forgot to mention, he told me that Mrs. Temple was actually making inquiries for a tenant to take the remainder of her lease of Stonecliff. That threatened a speedier

removal than I had calculated upon, and it worried me not a little.

Jessie, that day, was full of her party: she called it hers and talked of "what I wish," "what I shall do," quite naturally. Roger laughed at her a little, and reminded her that they must both ask Mrs. Housekeeper's permission, meaning mine; and then she would turn round to me very pleasantly, and ask me what I thought about things, which if I objected to would I knew be carried against me by the mere power of her pretty entreaties. Still I did object sometimes, because I considered it right; but I don't feel at all sure that I did it as I ought to have done, or without showing annoyance. The great question was whether it should be only a common tea-party and supper, or whether we should try to get up a dance. I preferred the tea-party; it was more what we had been used to. I thought, at first, we should not have enough for a dance. Besides, I had a dread of beginning that kind of thing for Jessie; her head was so easily turned; and if we set the example, others would be sure to follow it, and then there would be constant going out, and the regular farm life would be quite interrupted. What I wished was to ask a few neighbours at a time to drink tea, or even to dine, if we liked it, and entertain them in the old-fashioned way; perhaps with a rubber of whist, if they were elderly people, or with forfeits and games, if they were young. I should not have cared either if we had chosen to send for a fiddler, and dance just amongst ourselves when the evening came, but the thing I disapproved of was the notion of giving a large dancing party; and this I saw was what William and Roger both disliked also in their hearts, only, to humour Jessie, they would not openly object.

John Hervey quizzed her, declaring that she wished to show off like Mrs. Price; and asking her how she would send out her invitations; whether she meant to be "at home" on such an evening, as he had heard the great London people were. She bore his bantering extremely well, and seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise. I wished I could enjoy it

too, but things were too serious underneath all this joking. I felt they so little knew, any of them, the mischief they were doing her; Roger would have seen it if he had looked upon her as a responsible person, with serious duties to attend to, and he would then have objected strongly to all the fuss, and trouble, and upsetting of our ordinary life. But I was the manager and mistress, and the farm would, he knew, go on just as well whether Jessie went out and gave parties, or stayed at home quietly. His trust in me was unbounded, and the more he trusted, the more he was induced to indulge his wife.

I carried my point so far that Roger at last took my side in saying he should not like to ask people to a regular dance, and William supported us; but when we began to talk over the guests to be invited, the numbers mounted up so fast, that I felt tolerably certain how the affair would end. Jessie, I was sure, was longing to ask Mrs. Price. She gave several hints about it, but Roger did not take them, and I pretended not to understand them, for I thought it better to talk the matter over with her when we were by ourselves, and when I might be able to show her quietly the unfitness of such a proposal, which as likely as not might give Mrs. Price offence. We were lingering over the dinner, talking, and I was beginning to feel a little impatient, having a good deal of work before me for the afternoon, when Esther Smithson came running into the room, in a great hurry, to tell us that there was a horse coming down the lane at such a pace, she thought it must be running away, the gentleman did not seem able to stop it. One of the parlour windows looked towards the lane, and we all hurried to it, and saw, as Esther had described, a horse at full gallop coming up to the farmyard gate.

"He will be thrown," said Jessie in a frightened tone.

"The gate had better be opened, Roger," said William, but before he had spoken, Roger had gone out. He was not in time, however; the horse came to a sudden and violent stop, and the shock threw the rider upon the ground, with his head against the gate. We were naturally very much

alarmed, and all except William ran out directly. But before we reached the spot we heard the farm men saying there were no bones broken, the gentleman was only bruised, and we soon saw him sitting on the bank, holding his head with both hands, but otherwise apparently not much hurt. I knew him directly — it was Mr. Macdonald; and Jessie knew him too, and kept, as I observed, a little in the background. He did not seem to remark any of us particularly, but thanked us generally for our anxiety, and said he would mount his horse again, and ride back to Dene. It was a stupid business, the animal had taken fright at a wheel-barrow.

I earnestly hoped that Mr. Macdonald would do as he proposed, but Roger, I suppose, thought it inhospitable. and pressed him to come in and have a glass of wine.

"Not wine, I hope," was my whisper to John Hervey, as we stood apart: "do let him go; Roger knows nothing about him."

John smiled, and putting himself forward said: "With such a bruise as Mr. Macdonald has, the kindest offering would be ointment and bandages. I don't know whether there are such things at Sandcombe."

"At any rate, rest won't hurt any one after such a fall," said Roger, rather in a persisting tone. "Jessie, will you just go in, and tell William that Mr. Macdonald is coming."

John Hervey and I cast despairing glances at each other; he seemed amused, so was not I. Mr. Macdonald rose from his seat on the bank directly he heard Jessie's name, and going up to her shook hands, and said he had not known her, he hoped she would excuse it, but his head was in such a state of confusion; and he put his hand up as though he was in pain.

Jessie curtsied and looked very awkward, — and urged nothing about his going into the house, till Roger mentioned it again; and then both she and I were obliged to say something, merely that we might not appear inhospitable. But I confess I did it with a bad grace; and when Jessie went on

before, I walked behind with Mr. Hervey, and left Roger to entertain our new guest.

He made himself agreeable enough in the house, perhaps the fall had cleared his head; and when I could get over my innate dislike to him, I was obliged to own that Jessie was not so absolutely to be condemned for having liked him. Roger, after a while, went off with John Hervey, and told Jessie to do the honours; so she took her work and sat down in the parlour, — and I did the same, though it was very inconvenient to me. Mr. Macdonald must have stayed nearly an hour, talking all the time, though still complaining of his head. A good deal passed between him and Jessie about people whom I only knew by name, but it was all in a light way; though I thought I could perceive something like pique in his tone, and Jessie was nervous and short in her answers. If I had not known how affairs had once stood between them, I should not have noticed any thing particular. But I was provoked with Jessie for sending a message to Mrs. Price through him, and still more provoked with William for saying, as Mr. Macdonald bade him good-bye: "You have found your way to Sandcombe once, Sir, accidentally. I hope the next time you will come on purpose; we shall always be very glad to see you." The moment he was gone I could not help expressing what I felt, and saying that I thought a man with Mr. Macdonald's known habits was not desirable company; but William only laughed and told me that if I was so strait-laced, I must needs shut myself up entirely. And then, I suspect, being a little conscience-stricken, he called to Jessie, and asked her to fetch the newspaper and read to him, — and so the conversation was stopped.

But I was not going to let the matter rest. I went to Roger that same evening, when he came back from Hatton, — not telling him exactly that I wanted to talk to him, for I don't think men like that, they always think something must be going wrong in money matters, — but entering upon the subject accidentally, as it were, as we strolled round the garden.

"Mr. Macdonald," I said, "stayed a long time, and made himself more agreeable than I expected."

"Yes," replied Roger. "He is a good kind of inoffensive young man. I don't half believe what the world says of him."

"I was wondering about it myself, this afternoon," was my reply. "But I am afraid it is all but too true, and I was sorry on that account that William asked him to come again."

"Are you?" said Roger, and he thought a little. "Well! I don't know that I am."

"He won't suit you," I said.

"No, not at all," and Roger laughed. "But you know, Ursie, when one has done a man an unkindness, without meaning it, one is not sorry to have the opportunity of showing him a civility. I couldn't have pressed him to come to Sandcombe myself, but I am not sorry that William did it."

"He has no right to think it an unkindness," I said; "you had as much right to fall in love with Jessie as he had."

"Unkindness is not perhaps the right word; but it must make a man feel odd to see the person who has carried off just the very thing which he had wished for. And if, under such circumstances, he can meet one with an open hand and an open heart, why I think it is to his credit."

"The credit of his taste, perhaps," I replied; "I don't know that it says quite so much for his feeling."

"You would like a little jealousy," he said. "I think women always do. But I never was jealous myself, Ursie, and I don't understand jealousy in others."

"How can you tell that you are not jealous?" I said; "you, who were accepted the very first moment you made the offer."

"Well! that is true. But one thing I know, Ursie, that if I had had the slightest notion that Jessie doubted about her feeling for me, — if there had been any other person for whom she had even the inkling of a preference, I would have waited three, six, twelve months, and would at last have given her up entirely, rather than marry with the chance of finding that my wife had made a mistake."

"Then you are jealous," I said.

"No, not in the least. It would not have been from jealousy, but the wish to see the woman I loved happy, whether it were with me, or with any other person."

"You say more than many would," I replied.

"I say what I believe every honourable man, not eaten up by selfishness, feels, if he does not say it. You may not put faith in me, Ursie, but Jessie did."

An uncomfortable misgiving came over me. "You mean," I said, "that Jessie assured you she had never cared for any one but you."

"I did not ask her the question. I was not going to search into all the secrets of her little heart in days gone by. I had no right to do so. But I did ask whether at that time she felt herself free to give me a full, undivided affection."

"And she answered, yes."

"Of course, heartily, yes. If she had not, we should not now have been man and wife. More than that, of her own accord afterwards she assured me that the only person who had ever paid her any decided attention was Lieutenant Macdonald, for whom she had never felt anything approaching to real regard. You see, Ursie, it would be too silly now to turn round and be jealous."

"Too silly, indeed," I said; but an impression of something disagreeable remained on my mind. I was tempted to say, — "I suppose you know that Mr. Macdonald actually proposed to Jessie?" — but I was prevented by the dread of interfering in the slightest degree between husband and wife, — a dread first inculcated by Mrs. Weir in bygone days, and since deeply impressed upon me by experience. Roger saw that I was not satisfied, but his thoughts took a different direction from mine. He fancied that in some way I did not do justice to Jessie.

"I think, Ursie," he said, "that you scarcely understand Jessie. You look upon her as a child still, and seem to wonder that I should treat her as a woman."

"No, indeed," I replied; "I only think that she is young."

"Not so very much younger than you are; and I am sure no one can behave more discreetly than she does."

What could I say? It would have been irritating to tell him she had not yet been tried. So I made no reply, and Roger was pained, and thought I was cross; and thus we separated.

The invisible barrier which had lately been growing up between us, was by degrees becoming visible. Jessie took apparently very little interest in Mr. Macdonald, and scarcely mentioned his name. I said to her in the evening that it was strange he should have been brought to Sandcombe in that way, for it certainly must have been unpleasant to him; and her reply was, — "Oh, he must have forgotten all that nonsense now." But as soon as she said the words she tried to change the subject; and I, being determined to satisfy myself upon one point, continued it.

"I am glad Roger knows about it all," I said. "It is so much better not to have secrets from a husband."

"Oh, yes! much better — much —"

"And," I added, "they met very pleasantly and cordially, considering that Mr. Macdonald was a disappointed man."

"I don't think he took his disappointment much to heart," replied Jessie.

"I suppose Roger knows he actually made you an offer," I said.

"No — yes — no. I told him everything generally."

The answer did not please me. "Dear Jessie," I said, "you won't mind my telling you that Roger likes to hear things particularly, not generally. It can't make any difference to you or to any one, his knowing this fact; and yet it is just one which he might be annoyed to think was kept from him."

"I can't go back to the old subject," said Jessie. "I hate it, and, as you say, it won't make any difference."

"I have known Roger longer and more intimately than you have, Jessie," I said. "I know he has such strict notions of confidence between husband and wife."

I could not imagine why my words took such effect upon

her, but she turned quite pale, and, bursting into tears, said she was sure I did not love her, and that I did not like her marriage. She had felt it from the beginning, my manner had never been cordial, and people had noticed it.

It was the most trying of all accusations, — the least admitting of explanation. I could only say that she was wrong in listening to such nonsense; that I loved her very dearly, and was only anxious for her to be happy; and by degrees the fit of petulance subsided: but I could not again approach the subject of Mr. Macdonald, though it rested on my mind as a weight which I tried in vain to shake off.

CHAPTER LVII.

Before I again heard from Miss Milicent, an application had been made for Stonecliff; it was to be let for a year, and Mrs. Temple was preparing to go to the neighbourhood of London. Though I had been warned beforehand, the news came upon me like a thunderbolt, and in a moment faults of omission and neglect, as regarded Mrs. Weir, which I had never thought of before, seemed to rise up and reproach me.

I had been placed in a very difficult position, and had it but little in my power to serve her. There were a hundred excuses to be made, but I felt that I had not done my utmost for her. Latterly, especially, I had been so engrossed in our own home affairs, that I had given her comparatively few of my thoughts, and little of my time. Partly indeed this was owing to Mrs. Temple, who often interfered to prevent my seeing her; but Mrs. Weir could not be expected to understand this, and whenever I did visit her, always seemed to be so comforted by her trust in me, that it made me more and more anxious to be of some permanent use to her. I believe she fully believed that I was working all this time to further her wishes, whilst I was conscious that I was doing and could do nothing for her. This always made me very unhappy, and now she was to be taken quite away from me for months, per-

haps even entirely; for in spite of Mrs. Temple's economy, I shrewdly suspected she had been living beyond her means, and that the removal from Stonecliff was but the first step to larger measures of retrenchment. If this were so, Mrs. Weir, as long as she was with her, would be the first to suffer. I pondered the matter till I grew nervous in my anxiety, and at last I did, what lately I had been almost afraid to do; I went to Roger to open my heart to him.

I found him consulting with Jessie over several notes which had just been received, answers to the invitations to the party. I was a little surprised to see so many, and Roger and Jessie were surprised also. They were reckoning up numbers, and found that if we asked any more, we should have at least ten more than we had at first calculated upon. Jessie enjoyed the prospect; she liked a crowd, she said, they should be all the merrier. Roger looked a little grave; but turned the case over to me.

"We are in a difficulty, Ursie," he said; "I don't see how the rooms will hold them all."

"There is the barn," I said, in a joking tone.

"The barn! oh! yes, how delightful!" exclaimed Jessie. "I never thought of that. Don't you remember, Roger, when Mr. Stewart gave his tenants' ball, we all danced in the barn? I declare, Ursie, you have the best head of us all."

"But I am not Mr. Stewart," said Roger, "and I have no tenants."

"And I did not know we were going to give a grand dance," I added.

Jessie's face showed her disappointment. Roger smoothed her hair, and kissed her as he said, "We must keep within bounds, dear love, or folks will laugh at us. You know I am but Roger Grant, of Sandcombe, and you are but Roger Grant's wife. I don't think it will quite do to go to the expense of fitting up the barn for a dance."

"It would not be more expense than dancing in the great parlour," said Jessie; "but of course if Ursie objects —"

"If Roger objects, you mean," I said. "I have no voice in the matter."

"Oh, Ursie! as if Roger did not do everything you thought right. Why, you know you are quite mistress here."

"Both are mistresses," said Roger, quickly. "Ursie, for the sake of auld lang syne, and Jessie, because she has such a grand name, — Mrs. Grant. You know the world will expect a great deal of Mrs. Grant," he added, smiling fondly upon her.

"Yes," I said, "and so for once in a way I want Mrs. Grant to take a little authority upon herself, and order things her own way, and leave me to go about a little business I have in hand. Roger, can I speak with you for a few minutes?"

He looked at Jessie unwilling to leave her. "You are vexed, little one," he said; "but you don't think I would say 'No' if I could help it?"

"No," replied Jessie, "only" —

"Only what? let us have it out."

"Only Ursie does put herself against things, and if, as she says, I am mistress —"

"But you are not mistress, love. How should we get on without Ursie?"

"But Jessie is mistress," I said, "and she must learn to manage for herself. I only want her to do it in all things, not only when it is a question of a party."

"You are sisters," said Roger; "which will settle the difference. You agree to that, don't you, Ursie?"

"Yes," I said, but I don't think my tone pleased him. He looked from one to the other in annoyance. I knew so well what was passing in his mind. "Oh! you women, how difficult you are to manage, with your petty jealousies!" Perhaps I might have retaliated with, "Oh! you men, how provoking you are with your want of straightforward, moral courage!" But I could not retaliate upon Roger, it was too deeply painful to me to feel that in any way, even in judgment, he could be in fault.

Jessie, who really was very good-tempered upon the

whole, quickly recovered herself, and saying that she did not want to make a fuss, no doubt we knew best, carried off her notes to make a list of the persons who had accepted the invitation, after which she said, she should "go and look after William."

"She is very good and dear, isn't she?" said Roger, gazing after her as she left the room.

"I don't know what William would do without her," was my reply; "I am sure I could never find time to read to him as she does."

"And yet you are not satisfied with the place she takes in the house," continued Roger, "and you won't accept the joint dignity of a sister."

"How do you know?" I inquired, and I laughed a little, hoping to turn off the subject lightly.

"I couldn't help seeing it," he said — "your face always was a tell-tale, Trot."

"Never mind what I will accept, or what I won't," I said. "We shall do very well if Jessie will only remember that some day I may leave her, and that she had better practise being mistress beforehand."

He thought a little upon the answer, but he did not press the matter. I think he knew me too well to force upon me a subject which he saw I avoided; and we began talking about Mrs. Weir. Then he was quite himself — the Roger of the olden time, full of sympathy, understanding just what it was that troubled me, and giving me the best advice. I was not, he said, to consider myself responsible for the duties which others might choose to put upon me. Miss Milicent's having said that I was to look after her mother did not make it my business or take the burden from her, so he begged me not to trouble myself because occupations at home had prevented my doing as much for Mrs. Weir as I could have wished. The hopes I had held out myself were of more consequence. He thought I had been a little hasty in leading Mrs. Weir to trust so much in me, but I was bound to help her if I could, and he considered that I ought to go over to Stonecliff and see her

again, and if I found her seriously nervous at the prospect of going away, I should lose no time in putting the case before Mr. Richardson, and consulting with him either by speaking, or writing to him if he was still kept away, upon the best measures to be taken to bring Miss Milicent back, and replace Mrs. Weir in an independent home. Of course this required thought and judgment, for I was in a position which would make it extremely impertinent in me openly to interfere. Roger ended his advice by a hearty kiss and an assurance that he trusted me entirely, and did not know any person who would manage such a difficult business better.

The praise was very pleasant, but I could not live upon it. It elated and brightened me for the rest of the day, and Roger was satisfied, I suspect, at seeing me in good spirits; but when things rest upon a false foundation, there can be no real stability for happiness. I had said all I dared say about the party, but when I found Jessie still bent upon asking everyone at once, I had nothing to do but to give in, — and arrange it in the best way I could. It certainly did provoke me to have so much trouble put upon me, as if it was only my proper share, and I could not help thinking that if Jessie had been in my place, she would have been less anxious for numbers; but I tried, I hope heartily, not to show what I felt. The party was fixed for that day week. The notion of the barn was given up. Roger was firm about it, and William quite scouted the idea, and we did not say we were going to dance; — but when such numbers were brought together, — especially people from Hove, who would come a distance of seven miles, — I knew we must do something in the way of dancing, to amuse them. I think Jessie was pleased when she heard in a roundabout way through Martha, that every one was talking of the grand party to be given at Sandcombe, and I was pleased so far that it brought Mrs. Kemp over to know the truth of the report, and ask if she could be of any use. John Hervey drove her over. I was glad to have the opportunity of talking to him about Mrs. Weir, for I knew that I might not have him long to consult. He talked of taking another house now that he had

more money, and moreover he was so continually at Longside, and with Mary Kemp, that I had little doubt how things were going on, and that he would soon be entirely taken up with his own affairs. "What is all this I hear, Ursie?" said Mrs. Kemp, as she came into the parlour, looking the picture of kindness and good humour. "Fine doings and strange ones they tell me! — I hadn't a notion that Sandcombe could excite such a commotion in the world."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Why! I was in Hove yesterday, gossiping as you know one always does there — and wherever I went it was 'Well! Mrs. Kemp, of course we are to meet you at Sandcombe,' — till at last I opened my eyes, and found that I was in for a grand entertainment, instead of a quiet little tea-party. Whose doing is it?"

"I can tell," said John Hervey; "not Ursie's, you may be sure."

"Not mine, indeed," I said; "but when one hasn't strength to go against the stream, one must needs turn round and go with it; — so, dear Mrs. Kemp, you are come just in time to give me all kinds of advice, — and Mr. Hervey you are just in time too, for I wanted to ask you what you had heard lately about Stonecliff and Mrs. Weir.

"About Mrs. Weir is soon told," he said, "she is gone."

"Gone!" I exclaimed; and I felt terribly frightened. "Where? What do you mean? Gone! By herself?"

"Not quite so bad as that. Mrs. Temple has carried her off safely enough. But the report is, that it was not till Mrs. Weir had made the effort to walk off by herself."

I sat quite silent for a few moments, for I was thunder-struck; bitter tears of self-reproach gathered in my eyes, and I added:

"I would have seen her, I would have done any thing for her, God knows; but lately they would seldom let me go near her. Poor lady! and she must have thought me so neglectful. Did she really try to go away by herself?"

"*So they say*," replied John. "That is, the night before

last she got up, and began packing her things, and saying she couldn't be absent from her husband any longer, and talking so that the young woman who took Jessie's place was quite frightened, and called up Mrs. Temple: and the end of it was, that yesterday afternoon they all went off, where, no one seems quite to know. Letters are to be sent to London. The cook who is left in charge of the house brought me a note from Mrs. Temple about some business matter, and that was how I heard it all, for they kept it very close. She says that she is nearly sure Mrs. Weir believed she was really to be taken to her husband, but of course there is no thought of that."

"They are much more likely to take her to a lunatic asylum," said Mrs. Kemp.

I started up, and almost screamed. "Oh! never, never, it is impossible. She is no more out of her mind than I am. It is only the way they have gone on with her."

"There is no fear of an asylum," said Mr. Hervey. "At least not without clear proof that her brain is troubled. Mrs. Temple knows quite well how far she may go. Most likely she is taken up to London for medical advice."

"One drop of kindness would do more for her than a hundred drops of medicine," I exclaimed. "Oh! if I had never left her, if I had only gone my own way and lived with her!"

"Matters mightn't have been one iota better," said Mrs. Kemp, quietly. "We mustn't judge of any thing we do by its consequences, Ursie."

I fancied John Hervey looked as though he rather agreed with me, and considered I had been wrong; and I remembered how, some time ago, he had blamed me for not interfering to prevent Mrs. Weir's going to Stonecliff. The thought was very painful to me, and my head was in such a state of confusion from surprise and worry that I could not reason clearly.

"Poor child! I don't like to see you take on so," said Mrs. Kemp, for I could keep up no longer, and my tears fell fast.

"I believed I should hear from Miss Milicent to-day," I said; "and then I meant to have gone over at once to Mr. Richardson, if he is come back, and consulted him."

"He came last night," said John; "I should not wonder if that had something to do with Mrs. Temple's sudden move. She has a mortal dislike to Mr. Richardson, only one degree greater than she has to you, Ursie."

"She is a wretch," I exclaimed; "a hypocrite!"

Mrs. Kemp gently touched my arm. "Not quite, Ursie. I dare say she thinks that she is going the right way to work."

"She may do so," I replied; "but one thing I am quite sure of, that the thing which deludes Mrs. Temple, if she is deluded, is her own selfishness. It was to suit her own convenience that she first took Mrs. Weir into her house, and it is to suit her own convenience that she keeps her there, and it was for that she was always preaching about self-denial, and taking from Mrs. Weir all the little things which amused and pleased her. And it is selfishness, too," I added, "which keeps Miss Milicent abroad; and they may, both of them, build up ever so fine a fabric of good in their own fashion, but the foundation is selfish, and therefore I have no faith in any of it. I must say it out, and then I shall be better."

John Hervey smiled. "Well! Mrs. Kemp," he said; "we shall know where to come if we want to learn the use of strong words. I think I had better go out, and find William or Roger, and leave you to calm Ursie down if you can."

It seemed very unkind in him to leave me so; but I was too proud to show what I felt.

He went to the door, and then came back looking for his hat.

"You needn't part as if you were angry," said Mrs. Kemp.

"I am not angry," I replied, "but I know Mr. Hervey blames me. Yet it cannot be so much as I blame myself. If I had lived with Mrs. Weir, all this would never have happened."

"That is, if you had had the ordering of events, they would have been different," said Mrs. Kemp. "Ursie, that is surely a bit presumptuous. You did your duty."

I longed, I can't tell how much, for John to say the same. I felt it was the only thing which would satisfy me.

"John Hervey thinks so," continued Mrs. Kemp.

"John Hervey does not think so," I replied, looking at him.

He stood quite silent for an instant, then taking my hand as though to wish me good-bye, he said earnestly, "John Hervey does not know what he thinks, except that he would cut off his right hand to see you happy. If possible, you shall have news of Mrs. Weir in the course of a day or two."

Mrs. Kemp's eyes were fixed upon me intently.

"He is such a true, kind friend," I said, as he left the room. I was afraid whether she might think he was heartier in his manner to me than he was to Mary.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Mrs. Kemp and I were left alone for nearly an hour. Jessie was gone over to Dene to call on Mrs. Price. I had wished Roger to let the acquaintance drop, but, as he said, there seemed a kind of ungraciousness in this, when Mrs. Price had shown Jessie so much kindness, and therefore he went with her, making an excuse of business with Captain Price. I did not know that there was much to object to, only it was perpetually going about, and this I said to Mrs. Kemp when she asked me, in her blunt way, how things were working.

"If I was not here," I said, "she and Roger would both see matters differently, and I don't think he would be so foolish with her; but as it is, there is no doubt he spoils her. Sometimes I fancy it would be right in me to determine upon making a change for myself."

"You had better wait till the way is pointed out," replied Mrs. Kemp. "It would be making yourself responsible for

a good deal to go away and leave Jessie to herself; though I don't at all say it might not be better for her by and by."

"If one could be quite sure of her," I said; "but she frightens me a good deal sometimes. Her very good-nature is a snare, she is so willing to please every one, and that, and the love of going out, one can never say how much mischief it may lead to — and Roger, so blind as he is."

"There will come some children, by and by," said Mrs. Kemp, "and that will make a great difference. It sobers a woman vastly, Ursie, to have little helpless things to take care of."

"And till then I must look after her," I said. "Dear Mrs. Kemp, are sisters made for nothing but to look after their brothers' wives?"

"You are sharp, Ursie," replied Mrs. Kemp.

Yes, I was sharp, and I was sorry for it directly.

"If it had been any one but Roger," I said; "but that he should have thrown himself away!"

"Roger was your idol, my dear," said Mrs. Kemp, very gravely.

Her tone struck me forcibly. I did not know she read my heart so well.

"Yes," I said, "he was my idol."

"And God has broken your idol. It seems to me you have more cause to be thankful than to complain."

"Ah!" I said, "you don't know. The feeling grew up with me from childhood, I had no one else to look to."

"Except God."

I could make no answer.

"I suppose, my dear," continued Mrs. Kemp, "most of us make idols to ourselves some time in our lives. I know I have done so; and I remember how unjust I was in consequence."

"Unjust!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, my dear. It must be unjust to fancy a man an angel, and then to quarrel with him because he proves himself a man."

"You mean," I said, "that I am hard upon Roger."

"I think, my dear, that what would be called mistakes in other people, are called faults in him, and that is rather hard."

"Only because I loved him, because I do love him so dearly," I said; "there is no one like him now."

"I don't think there is, my dear. The way he goes on working, and improving, and setting an example all round the country, is quite a lesson, as the Farmer says; and if he does let his wife go out a little, and see her friends, it is never at the expense of his own business. Just see how Sandcombe has improved since he has had it."

"Yes," I said, for I was delighted to hear him praised, "he has turned off the idle men, and the new ones are kept twice as strictly, and he has his eye upon all the cottages; and as to the house, it is not like the same place."

"And he has but one fault," said Mrs. Kemp; "he over-indulges his wife."

"Only one," I replied; "but that is a great fault; at least, it may lead to great evil."

"I grant you that," she answered. "A good man's one fault, I often think, does more mischief than a bad man's twenty sins which sounds a hard doctrine, but I doubt if it isn't a true one. Anyhow, it is vexatious."

"And it seems so unkind to dwell upon it so much," I continued, "when I think how very kind and thoughtful he has been towards me. How few brothers would have hesitated to marry because their sisters had an indirect claim upon them? And I am sure Roger was quite honest when he said that he would not have thought of his own happiness if it had stood in the way of my having a home and a provision."

"Very few, indeed, my dear," observed Mrs. Kemp, emphatically; "and yet it would be wrong to quarrel with those who take a different view of duty. We must not lay more burdens upon others than God has thought fit to do. There is no doubt that you could very well have worked for yourself."

"And so it was all the more kind of Roger to be so considerate," I added. "Yes, I see that plainly; it is a constant

reproach to me when I feel provoked with him or with Jessie. But, dear Mrs. Kemp, how can one help one's feelings? I think I am a little better than I was; but just at first, when they came home, every word and action seemed to jar upon me."

"There is fault on both sides, probably," she replied. "All your life, Ursie, you have expected more from Roger than any sister has a right to do."

"It was love," I said, "not exactingness."

"But love is no excuse," answered Mrs. Kemp; "at least so it seems to me. You know, Ursie, God has been pleased to put us in certain relations to each other, by the ordering of His Providence. We may alter those relations, but we can't expect Him, therefore, to alter His Providence."

"I don't quite understand," I said.

"Why, it is just this. God made you and Roger brother and sister, not husband and wife. It is His will that a wife should come first, and a sister second. Now, if you bestow upon Roger a wife's affection, — and you do so when you are anxious to keep him all to yourself, and give up everything else for him, — you do in a way alter the arrangement which God has been pleased to mark out, and you mustn't be surprised if things don't go quite easily in consequence."

I did not quite like this repeated allusion to my private feelings. I hoped no one had ever noticed them. But Mrs. Kemp was so simple and straightforward there was no escaping from her remarks.

"I don't think," I said, "that I have had any choice in the matter. Whatever feeling I may have had for Roger, it grew up unconsciously."

"But there was common sense to teach you, my dear," replied Mrs. Kemp; "to say nothing of experience. Brothers marry, and sisters are parted from them, every day. But I do think you never would see that it was likely to be the same with Roger and you."

Mrs. Kemp was right there; I had wilfuly shut my eyes.

She continued: "And so, Ursie, I an afraid that some

of the aggravations are of your own making. That doesn't mean that I am not sorry for you, dear child," and she laid her hand kindly on mine.

I felt proud for the moment, and answered, "No doubt I am to blame; but I can't help thinking that if Roger had been only like any other brother to me, I should still have been jarred by a great many things when they first came home."

"Very likely," she replied. "It is a rare case when new relations are formed in a family without jarring. Sisters are jealous, and brothers are inconsiderate, and young wives don't quite know their proper position; and so between them, as often as not, they make a mess of it."

"I don't think Roger is inconsiderate," I was going to say, but I stopped, for I remembered some trifles in which he certainly had been so; but not choosing to blame him, I added: "It may have been quite right, but it did seem strange to see Jessie, all of a sudden, taking upon herself to do everything for Roger which I had been accustomed to do, and to hear her enter into all our affairs as if they were her own; when, three or four weeks before, she would have felt it quite a favour if we had told her anything about them."

"That is just what I meant," replied Mrs. Kemp. "I speak the more about it, because it was the blunder I made myself when I married. I rushed into my husband's family, and because they were good-natured to me, thought I couldn't do better than make myself quite one with them; and so I took it for granted that I was to hear everything, and talk of everything, and give my opinion, till at last I found out that, what they were quite willing to offer me as a favour, they were not at all willing that I should all of a sudden claim as a right. I drew back then, and was more timid, and only worked my way by degrees, and in the end it all came right, but it was some time first. Even as regards attention to her husband, a young wife is more prudent in keeping a little quiet when she is with his family. She will have opportunities enough of looking after him in her own home. Remember though, Ursie," added Mrs. Kemp, laughing, "that is only one side

of the question. I say it is prudent and kind for a wife to remember these things; but I don't say that a sister has any right to quarrel if she forgets them. Husband and wife are meant to be all in all to each other."

"And to show that they are so?" I said. "I wish I could have thought of that more when Roger and Jessie first came home; I am sure I should have borne things better. Jessie has no notion of concealing any thing she feels; and it was 'darling,' and 'dearest,' constantly, and a great deal more expression in all ways than I should have thought Roger could bear. But I was wrong. I do really think I was wrong in caring about it."

"Such a time is trying to all, my dear. I don't think you were wrong exactly. It is a thing one can't be expected to get over suddenly, when persons who, a short time before, were just kind and polite to each other, begin using such very affectionate terms without hesitation. And you had but a short apprenticeship; for Roger and Jessie weren't engaged very long, and she always seemed to me rather too much afraid of him then to be very outspoken as to her feelings. If we could place old heads upon young shoulders, young people would be careful how they thrust their fondness for each other upon their relations, however near and dear. It is not pleasant to witness, I know that by experience."

"No," I exclaimed, "not at all; and what is worst is for them to turn round, remembering one is present, and give one a kiss, as a kind of apology."

Mrs. Kemp smiled. "Trials! my dear, trials! But there is one cure for them, — to look at the truth. The feeling is not wrong, only the expression is unwise. Happy marriages are not so frequent that one should be put out at any thing which gives proof of affection. If Roger had been gloomy, and Jessie cold, you would have been much more unhappy."

"I should have been miserable," I exclaimed.

"And twenty years hence, if it should please God to spare all your lives, the very words and actions which give you a turn now, will be your comfort and delight. I am sure, Ursie,

you like to see old married people fond of each other; witness what I've heard you say about my dear old man and me."

"If you were to kiss and call each other 'dearest' all day long, I shouldn't care," I exclaimed, earnestly. "Dear Mrs. Kemp, you know it does my heart good to see the Farmer and you together. I makes one feel that, after all, married love is not delusion."

"It is no delusion, my dear," she answered; "it is a very great and blessed reality. But when first granted, young folks don't understand it, and their heads are most times turned by it; all the more reason, Ursie, why old folks, and quiet-minded ones, should be patient, and exercise the 'charity which beareth all things.'"

Mrs. Kemp talked a good deal more after this upon more general subjects, and in most of them I think we agreed. One piece of advice given me I particularly remember. It was as to the way in which I should look at disagreeable things; such, for instance, as the frets caused by the false position in which Jessie was placed, — mistress, when she chose to give orders, and not mistress when she wished to escape from her duties.

"It is very awkward and unpleasant, my dear," said Mrs. Kemp; "and I don't think you will gain anything by trying to persuade yourself that it is not. You know, Ursie, if you go to a child with a dose of medicine, which is not really nasty, and tell him that it is nice wine, ten to one but the child turns quite against it; whereas, if you say that it is medicine, he drinks it down, and is surprised to find it so little disagreeable. We are all like children, it seems to me, and must needs treat ourselves upon the same principles; and perhaps life itself, with all its trials, would be less hard if at the beginning we faced the fact, that it was intended to be medicine, and not wine."

Those words were a great help to me. Roger, and Jessie, and William, were so satisfied with everything, and so willing to imagine that I was satisfied also, that I had been trying

lately to bring myself into their views, and fighting, as it were, against my own convictions. My mind rested quite quietly in the certainty that I had trials intended for my good, and that all was not as I could wish, but as God saw best for me; and I was able then to acknowledge more thankfully the great alleviations which He had mercifully provided.

CHAPTER LIX.

For there were very great and hourly alleviations, and not alleviations only, but blessings. Looking back on the tone of complaint which has pervaded all I have lately been writing, it would seem as though I entirely overlooked them. But I trust this was not so. With a home, and friends, and constant useful occupation, and the prospect of a certain independence, I might have been a source of envy to thousands. Perhaps the very absence of great anxieties made me all the more alive to lesser ones. Moreover there was one circumstance which I knew I ought never to forget. If Roger had settled in Canada, and I had been compelled to remain with William at Sandcombe, my life would not only have been sadly dreary; but the responsibility would have been greater than I could, with any comfort, have undertaken. As it was, the place was always cheerful, and Jessie in her good nature, took a great deal from me in the way of waiting upon William, though even then she never seemed to acknowledge that the duty belonged to her especially, and that if she neglected it, no one else could be expected to attend to it. If an invitation or a plan for any kind of pleasure was proposed, she left William without a thought, considering apparently, that it was quite my place to provide for him whilst she was away. The result of this was, as I saw, that the occupation was in the end likely to become irksome, for no duty is a pleasure, unless we feel that it cannot be performed without us. Then it becomes important, and when it is important, we like it.

But I am always talking of Jessie and her short comings, and never of myself. In some ways I feel the subject too grave and painful to be entered upon willingly, for indeed this was not a good and happy period of my life internally. To be always in a fret, always prepared to be irritated, and to feel, whether justly or unjustly, that you have a cause for such irritation, is by no means conducive to that holy calmness and trust which we should all strive to attain. And as Mrs. Kemp suggested, I had begun life with a delusion. For I do not call my love for Roger in itself a fault. It was founded upon the pure and hallowed feelings of affection which God has implanted in every breast. But, in its extent, it was, little though I imagined it, very selfish. To keep him to myself, I would have excluded him from the highest happiness which earth can give. Now my heart in its loneliness was wandering over the dreary world, seeking rest and finding none, and at times returning to the Ark, which had once been its shelter, only to find the door closed against it, and to set forth again on the seemingly hopeless search after a love on which to repose undoubtingly. Yet I did not understand myself. I did not know what I was suffering from, or what I needed, though it is all plain to me now. I believed, indeed, I felt that I was religious; I acted upon religious principles, I tried to frame my life according to the precepts of the Bible. When I spoke to others of their duties, it was always with reference to the one great motive of pleasing God. And the thought of the Great Account which I should one day have to give before Him, if not always uppermost in my thoughts, had still sufficient influence to be a constant check upon my evil inclinations, and a warning whenever I had given way to them.

But through it all, my heart, — my quick, earnest, devoted love, — was given to Roger. Instead of loving him for God's sake; I loved God, if I may so say, for his sake, and the result was that religion had never made me thoroughly happy. I do not say that I had yet found out my mistake, but my eyes were opening to it. When human affection disappointed me, my reason, if not my feelings turned to God.

Rest and comfort, and fulness of joy were I knew to be found with Him, and in the bitterness of my disappointment, I turned to Him almost without understanding why. Again and again when I had no one else to speak to, no friend to whom I could explain my wretchedness, I said it out to my Saviour, not so much praying Him to help me, as telling Him what I suffered. It was a relief always at hand, and insensibly it became very precious to me, and the thought that He could quite understand, that He knew and would make allowance for the worn and fretted feelings, which to others would have appeared only unreasonable murmurings, gave me a sense of freedom and confidence which I had never before enjoyed. So, by degrees, I began to understand the difference between the influence of religion as a duty, and as a personal affection. Through the door which had been opened by disappointment religious love stole into my heart; and when at length it nestled in the empty chamber, the peace that accompanied it, left no room for regret for the exaggerated earthly feelings which had departed for ever.

But I write as if all had been easy, as though when my idol was broken, I could at once turn and raise an altar to the True God. It was not so. There was an enemy ever at hand, and there is one still, striving to prevent the entrance of the holy affection which was henceforth to be my joy. That enemy was myself, my old, impatient, hard-judging self, urged and stimulated doubtless by the Evil Spirit who is waiting to destroy us. All that I have recorded of myself must plainly show how much I had to fight against. Even when I judged rightly, I erred in the manner of expressing my judgment. I have heard that I used to be called angular, and I have learnt to look upon angularity as a great offence. In that last conversation with Mrs. Kemp, though I really had tried to keep down my irritable feelings, and though she had said nothing which ought to have provoked them, yet I had spoken so as to stir up the unkind nature within me, and aggravated myself merely by the expression of my own opinions. And this was continually the case in talking to

Roger; I was beginning to feel that he felt it, and that he avoided the subjects on which we might differ in consequence. One hasty sentence destroyed the effect of twenty gentle ones. So, again, this sharpness of mine gave a bias to the view which I took of all that Roger and Jessie did. I was very clear and decided in my self-government, and I carried out the same principle in regard to others, and was never contented till I had cut and apportioned, as it were, every one's conduct, and settled under what head each action was to be placed. Having once made out to my own satisfaction that Jessie had no strict guiding principle of duty, and that Roger was weak in his affection for her, I allotted their various actions to these motives, and forgot that there might be others, far better, which were influencing them. For instance, when Jessie read to William till she was tired, I said to myself, "she does it because she likes it better than looking after the servants." I did not remember that, no doubt, she had an anxious wish to do something for her husband's brother in his helpless state: and when Roger took her out with him and left me to attend to the duties at home, I said that he was following out his unwise system of indulgence. I did not consider that it is a husband's duty to make life pleasant to his wife if it lies in his power.

This was not a state of mind favourable to Christian charity, and it was therefore of necessity opposed to the love of God. I look back upon it now with great regret, and with only one comfort, that I was never blind to it, and never indulged it. On that day after the talk I had had with Mrs. Kemp, I went to my room feeling discontented with myself without having anything positively to lay to my own charge, only being conscious when I took up my Bible, as I was accustomed to do, to read the Evening Psalms, that a mist was floating between myself and my Saviour; that I could not come into His presence with that clearness of conscience, and quietness of spirit, which are essential for the enjoyment of his Love. Of course there was only one thing to be done, to pause at once and inquire, with God's help, where the fault.

lay. Mrs. Kemp had suggested it. I went over in my own mind all that had passed since the period of Roger's engagement, and saw as I had never seen before how false had been the relation in which up to that time I had placed myself with regard to him. I faced the future, its possible trials, and certain vexations, and owned that there was but one way of meeting them; to put away self once and for ever, to consider the good of others first, and my own feelings second; to act in fact justly and truly in the new family relations which had been formed, recognising every claim, however distasteful, and then to trust that God would, in His mercy, heal the wound which had been made, by making me dear to Roger and Jessie, not merely from natural affection, but from the consciousness that I was their truest and kindest friend, and therefore essential to their happiness. When this point had been gained I was able to attend to my reading and prayers, and after they were ended I went down stairs, and finding Jessie waiting upon William, took the opportunity of telling her that she was a much better sister to him than myself, for I had scarcely seen him all day. Jessie's face brightened as with sunshine when I said it, especially when William joined as lavishly in her praises. Whatever other faults Jessie might have, there was certainly no temper or angularity in her.

No news of Mrs. Weir, beyond the fact that Mrs. Temple had taken her to London! A hundred anxious fancies crowded into my mind, all based upon that one speech of Mrs. Kemp, that they might probably carry her to a Lunatic Asylum. Being very ignorant of the ways of the world in such cases, I did not know that this is more easily said than done, and I was certain that, when nervous and excited, Mrs. Weir was quite strange enough to induce any one to think that she was out of her mind. Not liking to interfere myself, I persuaded John Hervey to make friends with the woman who was left in charge of Stonecliff, and by her means, as she sometimes wrote to Mrs. Temple's maid, to let me know what was going on. Miss Milicent's silence disturbed me a good deal, I feared my last letter must have gone astray, and I remembered

what she had said about visiting Normandy, and thought it probable that might interfere with our having tidings of her for some time. Mr. Richardson thought the same when I went over to Compton, and, finding him returned, told him exactly how matters stood, and why I was uneasy. He was a very cautious man, and did not let out much of his mind to me, but I could discover that he did not think I was anxious about Mrs. Weir entirely without cause, and he said that he would himself write to Mrs. Temple, and make inquiries, and would let me know what she said. He had no idea, himself, that anything was amiss with Mrs. Weir beyond nervousness, but he felt that unwise treatment might at last bring on the malady which Mrs. Temple had often hinted to him she feared.

With this I was obliged to be satisfied, and there was not much leisure for indulging useless anxieties, as my attention was claimed by the preparations for the party, which interfered in no slight degree with the ordinary business of the farm. Indeed, since Jessie had gone out so much, it was almost more than I could do to keep things straight, and I often overworked myself, not liking to ask for extra help lest it might begin a system which in the end would be ruinous to Jessie's good principles, even if Roger could bear the expense. Jessie did now often say herself that I had so much to do; but I knew she would not care if there was another servant, and, once used to a certain number, she would never think she could do with less. We were to have a dinner for the Kemps and one or two of our particular friends first, and the rest were to come in the evening, and, having only the two parlours to put every one into, there was a good deal of difficulty in the arrangements. But Jessie saw none. The small parlour, she said, would do for dinner; it would not signify being a little crowded; we could bring in the round table from the other room, so that there would be plenty of space for the dishes, and every one would understand how it was; and then we could put the kitchen benches round the wall in the large parlour; and, if there were not enough, we might borrow some, and so accommodate all in the evening;

and whilst people were amusing themselves there, the little parlour might be cleared out for tea, and for any of the old people; and afterwards supper might be laid out in it. All this betokened a deliberate intention of dancing; for, without this, there was no reason why we should all crowd in such a way into the small parlour; and, at last, I taxed her with it, laughingly, saying I saw what she was aiming at, and she had much better own it at once, or we should make some great blunder.

She turned round to Roger, who had been listening to her plan with a face half grave, half pleased, being amused, as I could see, with her ingenuity.

"I knew Ursie would not allow it, Roger," she said.

"Please, dear Jessie!" I exclaimed, "indeed, that is such a false way of putting it. Roger, will you only say what you wish?"

"To please every one," he replied, with a smile; "which is just what you will say, Ursie, is impossible; and so, I suppose, it is. But it seems to me we are rather in for a dance, though we have not given out that it is to be one."

"Well, then," I said, lightly, for I felt it was no use any longer to fight the question; "if we are to do it, we must see to some things at once, — music, for instance."

"The fiddler from Compton will do quite well," said Roger.

"He scrapes so," said Jessie, looking disappointed. "I said something to Mrs. Price the other day, and she told me that when they gave their party at Dene, they sent for a man from Hove, who played beautifully, and, with the piano, they had charming music."

"Dear Jessie!" I exclaimed, "did you really talk to Mrs. Price about the party?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't I?"

"It is so awkward to consult a person about a thing which she is not to take part in."

"I did say I wished she could come; but I didn't exactly *invite her,*" said Jessie, in a hurried tone.

"And what answer did she make, my dear?" inquired Roger, quickly.

"She had an engagement for that evening," replied Jessie, "so it was out of the question. But you both look at me as if I had done something very wrong. Mrs. Price is not coming."

"It would have been better to have consulted Ursie before you said anything," replied Roger.

"Ursie doesn't like Mrs. Price," said Jessie; "and, Roger, dear, I didn't mean any harm; but it came quite naturally, when I was there, having known her so many years, and she having been always so kind to me. And, besides, if we visit, I don't see why she is to be left out."

It was a difficulty, certainly; and Roger, with Jessie by his side, was not likely to solve it. I could only be thankful for the engagement. But we were not to be set free from Dene quite so easily, for Jessie added, "I had a note from Mrs. Price just now, saying that she could put off her engagement, and I had better send back, only we began talking about other matters."

"You never told me anything about this before, my dear," said Roger, so gravely, that I thought if I had been Jessie I should have been frightened.

She answered, nervously, "I forgot it when we drove home that day, and it has scarcely entered my head since; and as Mrs. Price was not coming there was no need to think of it."

"But there is need now," I said. "May we see the note, Jessie?"

Her manner showed hesitation: she did not seem to know where she had left it.

"You had better go and find it, my dear," said Roger, and he sat himself down in a kind of determined attitude, which I knew meant that he was considerably put out.

Jessie went off. We remained silent for some moments. Then I said, "It is awkward; but she cannot be expected to see things as we see them."

Roger made no answer; and I did not venture any further

remark. Just as we heard Jessie's step in the passage, however, he said, "You and I should probably have done the same, Ursie." And when Jessie entered, he went up to her, and took the note out of her hand with a good-humoured smile, quite as though nothing was the matter. He read the note aloud: —

"My dear Jessie, — I find I can alter my day for dining in Hove, and as it would be great fun to see your first party, I have a notion of driving over, with as many gentlemen as I can bring, which I know will make me welcome. I don't know whether I shall persuade Macdonald to come; but, any how, you may expect your affectionate friend,

"JANE PRICE."

Roger laid down the note, and I caught it up.

"Gentlemen!" I exclaimed. "I am sure we don't want any of Mrs. Price's gentlemen here. What does it all mean?"

"It means what a good many people think a good deal of," said Roger, laughing. "We ought not to quarrel with Mrs. Price for a word, Ursie. But this threatens more than we were prepared for."

"I don't think Mr. Macdonald will come," said Jessie, and I thought she looked very uncomfortable.

"There is something else scratched out," said Roger, "which I suppose refers to him, only it is not honourable to try and read it."

I took the note from him, — I really don't know why, — certainly with no intention of making out what had been erased. Then I laid it down, and accidentally looking at my fingers saw that they were slightly stained with ink. The erasure was a fresh one.

The feeling that came over me I shall never forget. I looked at Jessie, and my head seemed dizzy with doubt. Was it possible there could be any deception in her?

No, it was impossible. That sweet, smiling, confiding face could not be a mask, and she was even now making all

the amends in her power for the foolish thing she had done, by taking upon herself more than the blame which Roger was inclined to give her.

"It was very wrong in me, I know," she said; "I ought to have asked first, but the wish came into my head, and was out of my mouth, before I had time to consider; and I repented directly, and was so glad when Mrs. Price said 'No.' It was quite a relief to me, and then it all passed away as if it had never happened, and I thought of mentioning what I had done, but I forgot it. That is all I have to say, but I am very sorry, very sorry indeed. Please, dear Roger, forgive me."

It was but a small fault. No wonder that Roger forgave it easily, with such a look of happy, trusting love. I could see then why he had kept such a guard over himself — that he might not show anger till he had heard the whole story. He was a man of singular self-command, and had tutored himself so that he never to my knowledge said a word to repent of.

"We must make the best of the business, now," he said; "and if Mrs. Price and the — what must we call them, Ursie? — come, they shall have the best welcome I can give. All the more because the visit is not likely to be repeated often. Jessie, love, Sandcombe and Dene were never made to run together, and so I'm sure you will remember, and let your communications with Mrs. Price be kept within careful limits."

He was quite enough in earnest then to satisfy even me, and Jessie, I perceived, was rather awed by him.

"Ursie quite feels with me, I am sure," he added, turning to me just as he was leaving the room, "and you will do well to consult her upon all points."

He did not look at me, and I was thankful for it. The very moment he was gone, I went up to Jessie, and with the note in my hand, pointing to the erasure, said: "Jessie, the ink was not dry. You scratched that out yourself."

Her cheek flushed, she paused, then answered, "Yes, I scratched it out. It was only, 'he is not sure whether he would be welcome,' and I thought Roger would not understand, or would ask questions, and I can't bear talking of it all."

The explanation was not satisfactory, and I answered, "Roger understands most things. Even if he did not, it would be better, Jessie, to annoy him than to make a mystery."

"Well, yes, I dare say you are right," and she went away.

She did not like my advice I saw, neither did I like her way of dealing with Roger. I was more really anxious about her that day than I had been at all.

CHAPTER LX.

Wednesday morning, the day of the party, arrived. It was a bright and calm day for the beginning of October, and I was glad to think that our friends who came from a distance would not be annoyed with wind and rain. Though I may seem to have set my face so much against the party, and to have complained of the work it caused, it must not be imagined that in my heart I at all disliked it. Every one, unless very well-disciplined, is apt to grumble more or less; — I don't mean that as an excuse but a fact, — and when one is telling a story the little black dots of troubles stand out more clearly in one's mind than the bright lines of pleasure. But I really liked the bustle, and was delighted when I found the whipt-creams turn out as well as they did, and enjoyed teaching Jessie to make the cake, and she and I and Roger had quite a merry half-hour, setting out the supper table, and describing all the dishes to William, whilst he, poor fellow! was pleased and glad to think he should meet so many of his friends. And then there was to be the cosy dinner first of all, with the Kemps, and old Mr. and Mrs. Brown, who had taken Hatton Farm, and I got quite into the spirit of the party before the day came, and rejoiced in the sunshine as much as Jessie herself. We were to dine at four o'clock; I did not like to have the dinner earlier, not knowing what we should do with the guests all the afternoon. Roger had given in to the notion of having the Hove fiddler for the evening, but he would not go to the expense of a piano, though Jessie urged it. About expense or show he always had his own way. All the morning I was very busy, and

Jessie too, more so indeed than we need have been, for Martha, whose temper was never very good, took it into her head to be particularly *contrary* in all her ways, and gave us more trouble than was necessary. A piece of boiled beef, a pie, and some roast chickens, with sweet things, was to be our dinner, and the beef I knew would take a long time before it was properly done, but all I could say I could not persuade Martha to have it ready for boiling at the time I had named, and I had lost a good deal of my power over her since she had learnt to call Jessie mistress, so that I could only beg not order. At last Jessie came to me in despair, begging me to go once more and see about it myself, for Martha had let the fire go down, and then had heaped up such a quantity of coal, there was no heat in it, and all she could get from her was, there was plenty of time, and it would do very well. I was setting out the dessert, but I left it directly, and went into the kitchen, and Jessie undertook to finish what I had begun. "You will never do without bellows, Martha," I said; "just go and fetch them;" and when they were brought, I knelt down before the fire and began to blow. Martha's temper grew worse at every puff. She kept near me, putting herself in my way, and leaning over the fire to stir something in a pot. I told her, that if she did not take care she would upset the saucepan, but my words were not attended to, and whilst looking round to see what the weather was like, I heard a cry and the same moment the hot water poured down upon me. Happily the greater portion fell upon my dress, but Martha, of course, screamed as though I had been killed, and brought in Jessie, and Esther Smithson, and the charwoman, and William, and a man from the yard, all eager to know what was the matter. I believe I was the only quiet person in the kitchen. I was burnt, and in a good deal of pain, but it might have been much worse. Thanks to Martha's bad fire the water was not actually boiling, and if I covered up my hand at once with cotton wool, I knew I might save myself from any great suffering. My chief thought then was for the boiled beef, and I would not hear of Jessie's attending to me, "I could manage," I said, "very well for myself."

"You will find some cotton wool in my second drawer," observed Jessie, as I left the kitchen, "if you happen to have none of your own."

It was a happy suggestion, for I had not had sufficient experience to keep a quantity of wool to provide against scalds and burns, so I went directly to Jessie's room. My hand being painful I wrapped the wool round it at once, instead of carrying it off, and sat down by the dressing-table to rest, for I was more flurried and frightened than I quite knew at first. Jessie's work-box was on the table, and opening it to find a bit of tape I saw Mrs. Price's note laid in it, apart from the envelope. Merely for the sake of neatness I put the note into its cover. As I did so my eye fell upon some words which I read without thinking, under the belief that they referred to the party. "I have much to say to you, for I can't understand you after the letters I have seen. I shall be glad to hear what you have to say for yourself. I only saw the letters yesterday." It was more startling than the scalding water, more painful far than the heat of the burn. I sat with the envelope in my hand thinking on it, asking myself what it could possibly mean, whilst every latent fear and suspicion rose up within me to increase my perplexity. How to satisfy myself was my difficulty. To doubt is the most deadly of all the offences which can be committed against family union. If Jessie once imagined I doubted her, all my influence over her, and I had much, would be gone instantly. And what it was I doubted or suspected I could not tell. Jessie had certainly been silly and vain before her marriage, and I could feel that she was silly and vain still, but I could not imagine her deceitful, and her love for Roger it was absolutely impossible to question. I had seen her much lately when thrown with different persons, and made a centre of interest and attraction, and though she might be excited and pleased by the attentions she received, I always noticed that her eye sought Roger's, and that she was never satisfied unless he was near. He himself was so certain of this, that he would have laughed to scorn the notion that she had a thought or feeling which was not shared with

him. And yet here was proof positive that she had. Mrs. Price's words referred to something which he knew nothing of. And then Jessie's hesitation, and the words which had been erased. There must be a mystery. My heart sank within me. If it were only a case of want of confidence, thoughtlessness, girlish folly, yet if it shook Roger's mind, if it opened his eyes to the fact that he had made a mistake in his choice of a wife, what a life-long disappointment would be in store for him.

I was left to myself for nearly twenty minutes; it was supposed that I was suffering pain and unable to work. I was suffering pain indeed, but of a very different kind from any which was suspected. But the quietness and solitude were very useful in soothing my perturbed mind, and before I again went down stairs I had made up my mind what was to be done; — nothing. The whole thing might be a trifle, at any rate it was evidently past. I would not make Jessie angry by inquiring into it, especially as she would be very likely to misunderstand the means by which I had gained my knowledge; but I would watch carefully all that went on; I would guard against anything like intimacy with Mrs. Price; I would be very kind and affectionate to Jessie, and then, when I had fully gained her affection, and made her forget her conviction that the marriage was not entirely agreeable to me, I would some day discreetly lead the subject round, and if possible bring her to an explanation. By that time, for I felt it would be a work of time, she and Roger would, as I hoped and believed, understand and be so necessary to each other, that any confession of past youthful folly or imprudence would be a less shock to him.

The one thing I dreaded was Mrs. Price. An unprincipled woman is much more dangerous than a bad man. The one is generally an open, the other a secret foe, and a young person like Jessie is so easily won upon, so willing to trust and be led, whilst there are no natural cautions to teach prudence and reserve. If once thoroughly influenced by Mrs. Price, and

led by her into anything like deceit, Jessie might risk Roger's happiness and her own for ever.

To say that I was as light hearted when I went down stairs as I was when I came up, would be far from the truth. Happily my burnt hand was a sufficient reason for being rather subdued, and every one supposed I was in pain, and blamed Martha for her carelessness accordingly. For myself I scarcely found it in my heart to blame her. Though I said, that Mrs. Price's words might only refer to some past trifling matters, I still had the dread that mischief might lurk beneath, and so I could not be too thankful for the accident which had led to my being prepared for it.

CHAPTER LXI.

We had not been a very punctual household lately, Jessie's gaieties had interfered. But William was determined that everything should be in time on this day, and gave us no rest with his cautions about it. Jessie went up to dress at three o'clock, but I was not able to get away from the kitchen till half-past three, and even then I left it rather with fear, and was obliged to say that I would be down again to see that all was ready before dinner was taken in. I was decidedly the head servant and not the mistress now, — for Jessie was called upon to receive the guests, and I had to work till the last moment.

It was a good thing that I made up my mind to my position beforehand, because, having done so, I was not annoyed at it. My best dark-green silk dress was soon put on, with a temporary apron over it, in case I should have anything more to do in the kitchen; but Jessie's dress was a much more important affair.

I am afraid I was a little like Roger, and inclined to spoil her in some ways, I was so pleased to see her look pretty; and though I strove not to show that I thought much of her beauty, I was always watching to see what people would think of her when she came in and out of a room.

The art of dress, too, I think generally goes with beauty. It is not that pretty people always think so much of what they shall wear, but that it is a kind of instinct with them.

I am sure I might have tried for months, and I should never have turned myself out to look in the slightest degree as well as Jessie, when she went to the parlour dressed in her delicate wedding silk. I stood looking after her as she ran down stairs, and when she was out of my sight, remained still in the same position thinking about her, not happy thoughts, but tender, loving ones, — more so than she or Roger fancied. Hardness, severity, angularity, — they were all on the surface. There was a place deep down in my heart for Jessie.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown were asked to please William. I should have been better satisfied myself, if they had been left out, we should have been such a snug party with only the Kemps; but perhaps it was better as it was on the whole, for we had one great disappointment. John Hervey, who as a matter of course had been asked also, did not make his appearance. We waited for him nearly a quarter of an hour, and then fearing the dinner would be spoilt, we thought it better to sit down. William was put out, more by the delay than by John's absence, but he kept his temper, as most of us can before strangers. Jessie took the top of the table, and did the honours very well. It was the first time since her marriage that we had had anything like a dinner party, and I fancied she would be nervous, and ask me to carve; but she seemed fully to understand her right place, and many pleasant compliments were paid her by old Mr. Brown, which she seemed quite to enjoy. Mrs. Brown praised her for the way the dinner was sent up, and for the sweet things, which certainly were very successful. They happened to be all my making, and Jessie said so, colouring, as though she was rather ashamed to own it.

"It is not everyone that has such a right hand," said Mr. Brown, thinking he must be civil to me.

"No, indeed," replied Jessie. "Ursie is a great help, I don't know what I should do without her."

"What indeed?" I thought to myself, and I was almost tempted to say, that a person with so many engagements as Jessie, wanted a right hand to keep the house straight. But of course I did not say it, and the conversation went on about housekeeping and farm troubles, and servants, in all which Jessie bore her part as though she was quite at the head of affairs; whilst, whenever any little manner went wrong, she quietly turned to me to put it right, as I can fancy the Queen would do to one of her ladies in waiting. It was one of Jessie's peculiarities that she could fit herself into any position in which she might be placed, and now I could see that Roger was quite pleased with and proud of her, — she was so attentive and hospitable. Nothing was said at dinner which at all touched upon Dene, but when the dessert was placed on the table, Mrs. Brown began praising some cowslip wine, which she declared reminded her of some she had tasted elsewhere; but she could not remember where, and at last she said, that she thought it must have been at Dene.

Mrs. Kemp looked up surprised. "I did not know you ever went there," she said. "I shall think better of Mrs. Price if she has such steady friends."

"Don't call us friends," replied Mrs. Brown; "it was only that my husband went over there accidentally to pay some money, and there came on a pouring shower, and so we were obliged to take shelter, and then Captain Price offered us cake and wine, which was more than his wife would have done; if I don't do her wrong in saying it."

"I think you do wrong her," said Jessie quickly. "She is very kind hearted, and would make friends with any one who would be friends with her."

"Oh! yes, well, I dare say," and Mrs. Brown looked a little awkward, "I forgot you and she were cronies; indeed I thought that would be all over now."

"My wife knew Mrs. Price when they were both children," observed Roger, before Jessie could speak again; "and as she is good-natured we must be civil, which is the reason why we have asked her here this evening."

A general blank seemed to fall upon the party. Mrs. Brown looked at Mrs. Kemp, and murmured something which sounded like "No doubt, it is all right." But it was evidently not all right in her estimation, and the silence became so uncomfortable that I lost my presence of mind, and began pressing Mrs. Kemp to take some apple jelly when she had some already on her plate, and poured out a glass of sherry for Mary Kemp, though she had begged for currant wine. Roger, I saw, was fully aware that the announcement he had made was disagreeable, but he was not in the least cowed by Mrs. Brown's stiff manner. Having once made up his mind that it was right to ask any one to his house, he was very indifferent as to what might be said about it; but I perceived he was vexed when Jessie, for want, I suppose, of something to say, went on to boast of her intimacy at Dene, to describe the place and the alterations, and to talk of the persons she had formerly met there. Some of them, I suppose, laying claim to the title of gentlemen and ladies, but not such as we had been accustomed to respect.

"My dear," he said at last, "those days are over. You were Jessie Lee then, you are Jessie Grant now," and Mrs. Brown pursed up her lip, and looked at Mrs. Kemp with a matronly smile of approbation, which seemed to say, "That is right. I am glad the husband can assert his authority over the giddy young thing."

Mrs. Kemp, Mary, and Mrs. Brown went into the large parlour as it grew dark, whilst Roger and his other friends stayed to have their talk over public matters. There were so many little trifles still to be seen to that I was glad to have them all quietly disposed of, and I called Jessie into the kitchen, to arrange one or two things about the supper, which Martha and Esther would be likely to forget. When I went back to the parlour and Jessie was gone upstairs, Mrs. Kemp and Mrs. Brown were in full talk, but they stopped directly I went in. Mary was sitting silent as usual. I fancied she was out of spirits because of the disappointment about John Hervey.

"They will be here soon, I suppose," said Mrs. Kemp, making room for me to sit down. "Come and warm yourself, Ursie, you won't be so well able to do that presently."

"Thank you," I said, "but I have been out in the kitchen, which is like an oven."

"I wish you would come," said Mrs. Kemp, looking round to see that I was alone. "Now, Mrs. Brown, just tell Ursie what you have been hearing, it will come better from you."

"I dare say she knows," replied Mrs. Brown; "unkind words fly fast, and I am not the one to wish to make them go faster."

"It's no unkindness to give a warning," said Mrs. Kemp; "and Ursie is quite safe."

"Well! all I would say is, that if your brother Roger does the wise and respectable thing, he won't let Mrs. Price bring herself and her idle friends to Sandcombe. His wife has been too much with them already, and when it's well known that there was flirting going on with that Mr. Macdonald whom people said last year she was sure to marry, up to the last moment before she turned round and said 'Yes' to your brother you will understand that the world will talk of her as one of the Dene set."

"People say what is false!" I exclaimed, though as I said the word a pang of doubt shot through me. "After Mrs. Morris's death, Jessie came directly here, and went from us to Mrs. Temple, where she was kept so close that if she walked over to Dene twice during the whole time it is more than I can answer for."

"May be. I trust it isn't true," said Mrs. Brown. "You know, my dear, I don't want to vex you, and I shouldn't have said it if it had not been for Mrs. Kemp's wish; but hearing things as I do from every-one, I can't help getting inklings of strange doings sometimes, and it does seem to me a pity that, after all the stories that has gone abroad about Mrs. Price and her goings on, she should be asked to Sandcombe just the first party that a young person like Mrs. Roger gives."

"Ursie doesn't know half the stories," said Mrs. Kemp, in a feeling tone.

"No," I said, "I don't. I have always tried not to hear them. I think that kind of scandalous gossip is odious, besides being wrong; but without hearing the stories, I know quite enough to understand that Mrs. Price is not a fit friend for Jessie. No woman who acts so as to have herself talked about can be."

"Quite right, my dear," said Mrs. Kemp. "Girls won't think it; but the worst thing that can befall them is for their name to be in every one's mouth."

"And the worst thing for a husband is for his wife to be talked about," said Mrs. Brown, who was rather inclined to be severe. "Your brother Roger is the last person, Ursula, who would bear that."

The last indeed! Perhaps no one but myself knew how keen Roger's feelings would be on such a point. I don't know what I could have said in reply, but at that moment our circle was disturbed by the arrival of visitors.

I went to receive them with the words ringing in my ears — "Roger is the last person who would bear that." The guests arrived one after the other very quickly. Jessie came down to do the honours, and I went to the party in the little parlour, and told them they must leave it whilst I made it ready for tea. William grumbled a little at being obliged to move, and I was obliged at last to scold and be impatient, — he and Farmer Kemp would stay so long trying to finish an argument.

"Why, lassie, what's come to you," said the Farmer, catching hold of me as I laughingly held open the door and told him plainly I wanted him gone. "She has taken to rule every one to-night, William, and that's not her way generally."

"She loves a bustle dearly," said William. "I don't believe she is ever happy unless she is ordering something or somebody."

I suppose my countenance betrayed that I was not thoroughly well pleased with the remark, for as William departed

the Farmer stayed behind, and added good-naturedly, "They may quarrel with you, Ursie, as much as they like for ordering, but they would none of them get on without you. But why don't you ask my girl to come and help you? she would rather be here than talking grand in the parlour; she isn't in very good spirits to-night, the why and the wherefore I dare say you will hear before long, only don't ask questions now, for it will upset her, and I don't want that."

Farmer Kemp had most unpleasantly and anxiously excited my curiosity. Mary's spirits were so even, I was sure it must be something very unusual which could depress her enough to excite notice. Putting things together, I naturally concluded the vexation must be about John Hervey. When I went back to the parlour I found Mrs. Price arrived, and with her two Dene visitors, not exactly strangers. Roger had met them when he was riding out with the fox-hounds, which he did every now and then. Mrs. Price was making much of them, sitting up at the top of the room, looking quite like the grandee of the company. The moment I went in I felt what a mistake had been made in inviting her, for her presence was like a wet blanket on the rest of the party. I glanced round to see what Jessie was doing, and was glad to find her, under Roger's care, trying to make herself generally agreeable. My dread was that, in spite of all she had once said to me about having changed her opinion of Mrs. Price, she would now devote herself to her. Roger seemed to be as much alive to that possibility as I was, and was going round with her from one to the other, and giving her hints as to what she should do to be civil and kind. He was resolved, I saw, that if Mrs. Price forced herself upon us, she should find herself placed quite on an equality with the rest of the world. Finding how things were going on, I was relieved from a sense of responsibility, and, following Farmer Kemp's suggestion, went to Mary, and asked her to come with me into the parlour, and help set out tea. Then she and I might stay there and make it, and Jessie might bring in different parties, as the room was too small to have all together. Mary was only too glad, she said, to be

useful, and went back with me to the little parlour directly; but she had another reason for desiring to be alone with me, for the moment Martha, who was setting out the tea, was gone, she drew out of her pocket a little note. "It is from John Hervey," she said. "I was to give it you when you were by yourself, in case he didn't come, and I have no hope of him now." She spoke very calmly, but a sigh followed the words. It sounded strange to me. Mary seldom laughed, often smiled, and scarcely ever sighed. "Just see to the tea, Mary, dear," I said, and I drew the candle towards me hurriedly. I had a dread that the note contained ill news.

"Dear Ursie, — I have had a note from a London doctor asking me odd questions about Mrs. Weir's being able to attend to business. I don't understand it, and don't like it, so I am going off myself to see what it all means. You shall hear again. If there should be anything in which your testimony as to Mrs. Weir's soundness of mind is likely to be of use, I am sure you would not object to giving it. A rumour has reached me that Mr. Weir is dangerously ill, at some little village in Normandy. If I could have been with you to-night I should have found out something from Mr. Macdonald, who I heard accidentally was likely to be one of the party. He is in correspondence with Miss Milicent. If you could ask him what he knows, and send me word, I should be glad. Of course I am very sorry not to be one at your merry-making, though I like Sandcombe best when you are all alone. Don't say to any one why I am gone.

"Very sincerely yours,
"JOHN HERVEY."

As I folded up the note again, I remarked that Mary had left off arranging the tea-cups, and was standing with her gaze intently fixed upon me. She blushed when our eyes met, and I thought she half expected me to give her the note, but I put it into my pocket without saying anything, and she finished preparing the tea, and then asked if she should go

and tell Jessie it was ready. It was as though she was glad to leave me. A second care frequently neutralises a first, and a third will often prevent one from thinking of either. What with Jessie's secret and Mary's, and anxiety about Mrs. Weir, I had so much to perplex me that I could do nothing but put it all aside, and take just the business of the moment. I laughed and talked with every one who came in, made myself, I am tolerably sure, agreeable to Mrs. Price, and behaved very civilly to her friends. In fact I could not properly keep any one fixed idea in my mind, and having intended to watch Jessie I found myself at last quite disregarding her. Tea being over, some of the elderly people remained in the little parlour to play whist and backgammon, and the young ones began to dance. I was asked to dance almost before any one, but I was obliged to refuse, at least for a while, since Jessie quite depended upon me to set everything going. Roger had left her to herself now, and I thought she looked a little fagged, as if such numbers were too much for her, and I begged her to go and sit down by Mrs. Kemp and rest a little, and not talk. Mrs. Kemp, I said, would quite understand her wishing to be quiet. This was just when a country-dance was beginning, and she left me, as I thought, intending to do what I had proposed, but to my annoyance I perceived that Mrs. Price, who, I fancied, was sure to dance, was sitting down also, and that Jessie went up to her immediately.

I noticed her but little after that for nearly half an hour, the dance was kept up merrily, and I went to see how all things were going on in the little parlour, and then stayed a few minutes in the kitchen, giving an order about supper. On my return to the dancing-room, Mrs. Price and Jessie were not to be seen. I looked, and waited, and watched, and looked, but they were still absent. They were gone, I felt sure, to Jessie's room, that they might have Jessie's favourite amusement, a talk. Nothing would annoy Roger more, and Mrs. Kemp, I saw, was noticing Jessie's absence, and Mrs. Brown's quick eye wandering all round the room, as she wondered what had become of her. This would not do. She

must be brought down, and made to be attentive to her company at all events, and I hurried upstairs, knocked at Jessie's door, heard Mrs. Price's voice say "Come in," and entering found Jessie in a flood of tears. My consternation need not be described, but Mrs. Price came forward to explain with the utmost coolness — "Poor Jessie was a little over-tired, hysterical — she had been working too hard — such a large party was a great undertaking. If I would only leave her to her, she would take the greatest care of her, and bring her down again in a few minutes quite well."

"I think, if you will allow me to say so, Jessie had better be left to me," I said, "I know exactly what is good for her."

"Oh! no doubt," and Mrs. Price became very stiff and proud; "but Jessie herself will be the best judge. Such an old friend as I am, I think, might be allowed to stay."

"Leave us, Ursie, indeed you must," said Jessie, in an eager voice. "They can't do without you downstairs. I would rather a great deal, and I shall be down directly; do go."

"I had better bring you some sal volatile," I said; "you won't do without it."

"I want nothing, nothing, — it isn't anything. I only wish — please just go."

"I shall send Roger to you," I said quietly, for I felt that Mrs. Price, if not Jessie, was deceiving me. Jessie's voice showed neither hysterics nor faintness, but only great mental disquiet. I left the room, heard the door closed violently behind me, hurried down the stairs, and at the bottom, rushed up against some one in the dark passage, and found myself in contact with Mr. Macdonald.

He made a hasty apology for coming so late, which I was too worried to attend to; why he came at all was the question I was most inclined to ask. I thought we had been safe from him. I could not find it in my heart to be gracious and civil, and I don't know what I said, until we stood at the parlour door; then I suddenly recollected John Hervey's note, and,

seizing upon the present moment as the most favourable I could hope to have, begged for a few moments' conversation with him. He seemed astonished, and I thought nervous, but of course he assented, and much, I suspect, to the surprise of the friends who knew or thought about me, we entered the room rather confidentially together. Before, however, I could begin the subject of Mr. Weir, Mrs. Kemp came up to me and inquired for Jessie; was she ill? — tired? — was anything amiss? "Nothing," I said, shortly. "She will be down directly." Mrs. Kemp looked vexed, and drew back. Mr. Macdonald asked where Mrs. Grant was, and he put up his eye-glass and glanced round the room.

"Oh! I see. I beg your pardon, but I will return directly," and he left me to go up to Jessie, who, just at that instant, came in, her arm within Mrs. Price's, as if they were the dearest friends possible.

The meeting certainly was a curious one. I, who knew Jessie so well, could read at once in her countenance a mixture of fear, dislike, and excitement, which she vainly endeavoured to hide under an appearance of ease. Mr. Macdonald's face was not so well known to me; but if I could at all guess its meaning, there was a great deal of pride and spite in his heart. Mrs. Price was full of flattery and airs, making such a fuss about him, that I could not bear to look at her, and talking so loudly that every one was noticing her, and necessarily observing Jessie also. This could not be allowed to continue. I felt as though I must rush up to Jessie, and carry her away from them by force; but just then, the reel which had been going on when I came in, was finished, and, in the general movement, Jessie was obliged to move also, and Mr. Macdonald returned to me, ready, as he said, for our conversation. It was precisely what I did not want, — to have a private talk with him when every one was sitting down, and might remark upon us; but a clear conscience makes one bold, and knowing full well that I would never have said half-a-dozen words to him but from necessity, I began at once:

"You have heard from Miss Weir, lately, I think, Mr. Macdonald, have you not?"

"Yes, this week. I have had that honour."

"And may I ask what the accounts of Mr. Weir are? Some one told me he was very ill."

"Miss Weir mentioned an indisposition — a fever, I think she called it."

He looked so intolerably conceited, I turned away my head, because I could not endure to watch him. "Is it a dangerous illness?" I said.

"Well! yes, I suppose it may be. Miss Weir's communications touch slightly upon the subject;" and he put on a very mysterious air.

"I suppose you would not mind giving me Miss Weir's direction," I continued; "I am wishing to write to her."

He hesitated. "I believe Mr. Weir is moving about. If you wish that a letter should be forwarded, and would entrust it to me —"

"Thank you," I said, hastily; "but it is not written. Miss Milicent told me she should be in Normandy."

"In Normandy? yes, she may be."

"But you must know where she was when you last heard from her," I said. "If you would only tell me that, it would help me."

"It was an odd direction. French names are difficult to remember. I may be able to give you the information to-morrow, or the next day, — or, — I am almost afraid I may have mislaid the letter."

"Or you don't wish to tell me, Mr. Macdonald," I exclaimed. "I am sorry I have asked you."

He made a kind of bow, more in mockery than politeness, and murmured something about being unfortunately unable to gratify my curiosity; and then walked away.

Mary Kemp drew near to me, as I stood thinking. "Ursie," she said, "that is an odious man. How Jessie hates him!"

"Does she?" I replied. "How can you tell?"

"From her look when she saw him. But she liked him once. How is it she is so changed?"

"She knows him better," I said. "And she has Roger."

"Yes, Roger, to be sure, that would be enough as a contrast; but I should be afraid if I had jilted Mr. Macdonald. I should think he would be revenged."

The expression struck me, and I repeated it, pondering upon it, but adding, "Jessie did not jilt him."

"I thought she did; people say so."

I was called away, and there was no time to undertake Jessie's defence; but I felt as though a clue had been given me, and throughout all the remainder of that evening's excitement, I was bent upon the one object of following it.

Jessie, Mrs. Price, and Mr. Macdonald, were never for five minutes absent from my thoughts or my watchfulness. I saw that Jessie appeared to have recovered herself, but that her eye was restless, and her cheek flushed, and I noticed that Roger's entrance made her shrink from Mrs. Price, evidently unwilling that he should see them together. I noticed that she gave herself up almost exclusively to Mrs. Price's friends, dancing twice with the strangers, and only once with any of her old friends, and at last I saw her stand up with Mr. Macdonald, looking, at the same time, frightened and nervous, but talking, as was her wont, all the time, to cover her awkwardness. And, towards the end of the dance, I observed also that she became much graver, even, I might have said, unhappy; whilst there was something in his manner which implied, not liking certainly, but satisfaction and triumph. Mary Kemp might be right, but jilt him? No, Jessie certainly was free from that charge. And what could be his revenge? Oh! if Roger could but see with my eyes, if he could only be alive to the weakness of Jessie's character, and keep her from those who might lead her to deceit. But he saw nothing except that his wife was winning, and lovely, and devoted to him. He was the only person in the room that night, — I felt it with uneasiness and dismay, — who did not perceive that some strong tie had been formed

between Jessie and the inmates of Dene which, whether it existed with or against her will, could tend neither to his happiness, nor to her own goodness and respectability.

About eleven o'clock we were ready for supper. Mrs. Price went in first, and Jessie with her of course. I stayed behind to take care of the second party. So I lost sight of her. Supper was a long business. I was very tired and glad to remain quietly by myself for a few minutes in the great parlour. Farmer Kemp came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder; "Asleep, lassie; you ought to be waking."

"My business is nearly over," I said, "I may begin to think of sleep."

"Not yet" he said earnestly. "What can that flaunting woman and her friend be talking about to your pretty little sister-in-law?'

I looked round; they were close to the open door. I was behind them, and I could not see their faces. When I moved, I caught sight of Jessie's countenance, sadly anxious; Mrs. Price's sarcastic, the other was hidden. I heard Mrs. Price say, "I really must go and put on my cloak, it is late." She went upstairs, and Jessie stayed behind; she did not notice me, — I could have said, indeed, that she was too engrossed to notice anything except the person before her. "Oh! Mr. Macdonald," I heard her say, in a low, hurried voice; "it is not honourable, and they can be nothing to you now."

I did not catch his answer.

"You have deceived me," I heard Jessie add; "you said they were destroyed;" and then, seeing me, every trace of colour left her cheeks, and she rushed away.

Mrs. Price's departure was quickly followed by others, only a few lingered round the supper-table till after twelve. Farmer Kemp and his wife, and Mary were the very last. William sat in the corner of the room fast asleep, while Roger and Jessie were attending upon the friends who were just going. We heard the repeated "Good-bye's" and "Thank you," and "We have had such a pleasant evening," and Jessie's voice was cordial, and Roger's full of thorough satis-

faction that everything had passed off so well, and then they came back into the little parlour together.

"Here is a seat for you, little one, in the arm chair," said Roger. He placed Jessie in it, and brought her a foot-stool. "You are tired out, I know; but so well you did everything! Didn't she, Ursie? I don't know when we have had such a jolly evening. What do you like to have, love? A glass of wine is best."

"I like to have you next me," said Jessie, "I don't want anything else;" and her tired face resumed its bright look, as Roger laughingly sat down at her feet, and asked Farmer Kemp to give her a bit of chicken, and he would see that she ate it. The Farmer cut the chicken as he was desired, but directly afterwards turned to me.

"Somebody else wants looking after," he said; "you've been upon the move for how many hours, Ursie?"

"I am too tired to reckon," was my reply.

Roger jumped up from his seat and came up to me. "Are you really so tired, Trot?"

"Really," I said, "is it surprising?" and I laughed a little.

"Tired with thinking of every one but herself," said Mrs. Kemp, kindly, for she was extremely fond of me.

I might have been vexed at Roger's coldness at any other time, but just then I really could not think about myself at all. "We must send Jessie to bed at once," I said; "she will be quite knocked up if we don't."

"And leave you to set the house right, I suppose," said Farmer Kemp. "Well! there's nothing in this world like a good heart for work. Come, mistress!" and he spoke to his wife, "since going is the order of the day."

Mrs. Kemp had her bonnet and cloak on, and was quite ready, so was Mary. I put one or two other wraps round them, for the night was cold.

As I was doing this, Mary Kemp said, in a low voice, "Have you any note, any message for John Hervey? Perhaps I shall be writing to him."

"None, thank you. I have not had time to think about things."

I fancied Mary looked rather blank, but my attention was drawn to another matter, for Roger said quickly, "A glass of water, Ursie; quick! Jessie is faint."

Her head was leaning back, and she was deadly pale, but she had not fainted away.

Roger was alarmed, I was anxious, Mrs. Kemp was quite cool, and took it as a matter of no consequence. We all stood by looking at Jessie.

"She has been talking, and laughing, and standing about more than is good for her," said Mrs. Kemp, "but she will be quite well to-morrow. Now, my dear, if you feel better, let Roger take you up stairs." And before Jessie seemed to be quite aware that she was able to move, Mrs. Kemp had gently forced her to stand up, and, supported by Roger, she left the room. "Good night, Ursie, my dear, and go to bed, and to sleep, as quickly as you can," said Mrs. Kemp, as I went out with her into the passage. "And don't worry yourself, if you can help it, about things which can't be helped or mended."

"And keep an eye upon that giddy little woman, Ursie," added the farmer. "Depend upon it, if you don't, she'll get you all into a scrape some day, through that flighty friend of hers."

CHAPTER LXII.

I slept but little, in spite of my fatigue. Thoughts of Jessie were haunting me; not the hard thoughts which Farmer Kemp might have had. There was no such vanity in her now as would make her disobedient to Roger, that I was convinced of; whatever folly she might be led into would be the consequence of some difficulty in which she had involved herself by past imprudence. Mrs. Price had no real affection for her, but was making up to her for purposes of her own; perhaps wishing to show that she was not entirely overlooked by per-

sons of respectability; perhaps — and just as likely — merely because she knew that we had set ourselves against the intimacy. Mr. Macdonald, if he had ever really been attached to Jessie, which I very much doubted, clearly disliked her now; yet it seemed to me as though he and Mrs. Price had her in their power, and were in some way tyrannising over her. And how this might end was, I confess, a very anxious and uncomfortable thought. Jessie was so weak, and so painfully deficient in moral courage, that I could never feel sure of her. Some deception there must have been already, and more there might be; and with her ignorance and thoughtlessness, she would easily, without the least intention of real evil, be led to do and say things which would materially injure her in the eyes of the hard-judging world. I trembled for Jessie, but I was miserable for Roger. Even now, if he could see and know all that I knew, he would, in all probability discover that his trust in his wife had been blind and mistaken, and how could I prevent the evil from going further? — how could I induce Jessie to be open, with that perfect openness which is the only security for married happiness, when she knew, even better than myself, that the acknowledgment of any past deception must shake Roger's confidence, and would almost necessarily be a great trial to his affection? Jessie was not the person who would risk a present suffering for the sake of avoiding a greater future evil. Rather she would go on contriving, and evading, and delaying, and intending, keeping her eyes upon truth in the far distance and forgetting, as she did so, that she was following the untruth which stood immediately in her path.

An effort, however, must, I knew, be made at once. I had discovered quite enough to give me cause for demanding an explanation, and if she hated me for it, I still must have it. It was with this full intention that I went down stairs to our late breakfast — yet one which was too early for Jessie. She did not make her appearance. Roger was up and out before I was ready, and William and I breakfasted together. The post came in before we had finished. There was a letter for me in John Hervey's handwriting; but William had some

business letters, and I was obliged to read them first, and put my own aside. I was kept talking about things in which I felt no interest, for more than ten minutes, and then, finding that William would not allow me any silence, I carried off my letter to read alone. It required but a few moments to get through it, but it left me in a state of bewilderment. It was written in pencil, and dated from the house of Mrs. Weir's physician.

"Dear Ursie,

"I have but five minutes to save the post. I have seen Mrs. Temple, Dr. Green, and Mrs. Weir. Mrs. Temple is frightened, and not without cause. But they all say that if you could come up, you might be of great use, for Mrs. Weir is always asking for you, and they can't tell how to satisfy or keep her quiet. I said plainly to Mrs. Temple that she must undertake your expenses, and she is prepared to do so. Only don't delay. If you can be here to-morrow by the train which comes in at 3.25, Mrs. Temple's maid will be at the station to meet you, and I shall be there too, if I possibly can. If you can let Mary Kemp know that you have heard from me, do. It will explain my not writing to her, but she shall hear to-morrow.

"Very sincerely yours,
"John Hervey."

Thoughts of Jessie were for the moment chased from my mind as though they had never been; and no wonder. I had but one hour to prepare myself. Go, of course, I must. The hopes of comfort which I had held out to Mrs. Weir were a claim upon me, putting aside every consideration of early kindness. When anxiety for Jessie again presented itself, I could only determine to write to her. I went to Roger, and consulted him, talking over what should be done in my absence, and settling nothing, because I did not imagine I could be detained more than a few days. Then I packed up a few things, wrote a line to Mary Kemp, ran up to Jessie's

room, and, finding her in bed, sat down and said all I could think of, and forgot every thing I most wished to remember, except that I did beg her to keep clear of Mrs. Price; and, at nearly the last moment, examined my purse, found I had not sufficient money for my journey, and had a long, tiresome business in explaining to William — for I never mixed my accounts with Roger and Jessie — what I should want; and, at length, just as the clock struck nine, found myself driving into Hove, on my way to London. Roger would have gone with me, but I would not allow it. I had travelled alone when I came back from my visit to Mrs. Mason, a year or two before, and knew what I was to do, — and for us both to have been away from the Farm would have been extremely inconvenient. He was most affectionate and understanding, and begged me to write the very moment I arrived, that they might have a letter the next morning.

All railway journeys are very much alike, unless there is the pleasant variety of breaking your limbs or being crushed to death, and my journey was in no way remarkable, except that I had very silent companions, who gave me a sufficient opportunity for meditation. We reached London at 3.25 precisely. Mrs. Temple's maid, whom I knew by sight, was standing on the platform of the station, and behind her was John Hervey. He greeted me as though we had not met for weeks.

"A glad sight, Ursie! I began to think whether you would come; but you are always to be depended on. Of course you are going at once to Wimpole Street?"

"Yes, I hope so; but I must have a few words with you first. What shall we do with Andrews?"

"Leave her with your box and the cab till you are ready. She won't mind waiting. These are strange times, Ursie."

John gave his directions, which Andrews seemed to think quite natural, and then turned aside with me. We sat down for an instant, but I could not bear that, and we paced the platform.

"Now, tell me," I said; "what is the true state of the case?"

"I can't make out, neither can the doctors; that is why we have sent for you. Mrs. Temple insists upon it that Mrs. Weir's mind is quite gone, she really thinks so, and is frightened. The doctors say 'No;' and I should say 'No,' as far as business is concerned. She had some affairs to settle with me yesterday, and was very fairly collected and sensible. But she cries all day, eats nothing, and every now and then answers so strangely that really it is difficult to believe that she is sane."

"But I don't see what I am to do," I said.

"She wants a soothing influence; that is what Dr. Green declares. You know I came to London yesterday. I saw him then at Mrs. Temple's; he wanted to find out from me what kind of state she was in for business. Afterwards, I had a private talk with him, and put him up to a good deal which he had no notion of before. He felt that Mrs. Weir was not in good hands; but there was no moving her. At last a bright thought struck me, and I mentioned you. He caught at the notion, and Mrs. Temple came, and it was proposed. She set herself against it, as you may imagine. I think her manner was quite sufficient to show the doctor what she really is, and he was more determined; and, at last, he carried his point."

"So, I am come quite against Mrs. Temple's wish," I said.

"Not that entirely. Dr. Green frightened her at last into thinking that you were likely to be her best friend. You will find her tolerably civil. She is quite a different person to me, so gracious, I don't know where I am when I am speaking to her. Yet wishing much to have you here, I would not trust to her writing, in spite of her promises, so I proposed to do it myself, and she was quite willing, which was odd enough, only she has just now taken up the line of not having a voice in any arrangement. I fancy she thinks it safer, as putting away all responsibility. That was why I wrote you that scrawl from Dr. Green's house. He waited to make some memorandums of

things I had told him, and took me back there for the purpose. I was terribly afraid it would be too late for the post, he kept me talking so till the last minute. But you are come, Ursie, and the load isn't half so heavy."

That was natural enough; for a very large share of it had been put upon me by this hurried explanation. The doctor, and Mrs. Temple, and John Hervey, — they all looked to me, it seemed, and a more ignorant, inexperienced being in such matters there could not be.

However, there is nothing like seeing no means of escape from a difficulty, and having been brought into my present position by God's Providence, I trusted that He would enable me to do my duty in it, kindly and bravely.

"I shall not go with you to Wimpole Street," said John. "I shall see as little of you as possible, only perhaps I shall call to-morrow; after that, indeed, I must go home. It won't do to make Mrs. Temple think there is any thing like a plan between us, though what it could be about is more than I can tell. But I know she is always suspicious of something wrong, when two people agree in opposing her. Whatever you do, Ursie, must be done by yourself, with Dr. Green's sanction. He will side with you, I am sure. And if there is any notion of removing Mrs. Weir from Mrs. Temple's care; all the servants will take your part, for they are tired out, so Andrews tells me, with having her there. The young woman who took Jessie's place went away when they left Stonecliff."

"Remove Mrs. Weir," I said; "but where? — what is to be done with her?"

"I can't tell; no one can tell, Ursie; it all rests upon you." Very poor comfort, indeed! But there was real help in John's hearty sympathy, which I felt I was sure of under all circumstances. He put me into the cab with Andrews. I had only time to say, hoping to please him, "Mary has your message," and he nodded his thanks just as we were driving off.

We rattled through the streets at a quick pace, but I wished it had been quicker. I was beginning to feel painfully *nervous.* Andrews, knowing I had only been once in London

before, pointed out all that was worth seeing, but I scarcely saw any thing; — only every moment I thought the cab was going to stop, and then my heart stopped too, and went on at an increased rate afterwards, to make up, I suppose, for lost time. The thundering rap at the door was speedily answered. My box was taken out, the cabman paid, and I was ushered into the house.

"Wait here," said Andrews, opening the dining-room door, "and I will tell Mrs. Temple you are come." The room was dingy; it had a very lodging-house look, for Mrs. Temple had only taken a part of the house for a few weeks. I thought of Dene, and the Heath, and Stonecliff, and pictured to myself what Mrs. Weir's feelings must be, shut up in this London prison. Folding doors divided the dining-room from an apartment at the back of the house. As I sat thinking, a low moaning sound came through the crevice, and soon I heard a voice — Mrs. Temple's voice — not quite so harsh as usual, but evidently striving against impatience. Still the moaning continued. At last I heard Mrs. Temple say, "If you will only do what the doctor tells you, — but you can't have any thing you wish, Aunt, till you do." And poor Mrs. Weir, for it could be no one else, was silent for a few seconds, and then Mrs. Temple left her and came in to me, and the moaning went on as before.

Mrs. Temple was changed since I last saw her. She had passed through a good deal of trouble, and much of her stateliness of manner was gone, it was turned into irritability. But to me she was quite civil; I felt, at once, that, owing to the pressure of circumstances, I should have but little difficulty in obtaining and keeping an independent position, if only I was not afraid to decide and act upon my decision.

She thanked me for coming, — coldly, — but still I was thanked, and then she began to explain her view of Mrs. Weir's case. It may be expressed in a few words. Her Aunt's mind, she said, was quite broken down, and nothing remained to be done but to put her under strict, medical care. The object in sending for me was, that as I had known Mrs.

Weir so long, I might prepare her for this necessary step, and induce her to submit to it gently.

The two ideas seemed to me inconsistent. If Mrs. Weir was in a state in which by reasoning she could be brought to submission, her mind certainly could not be quite broken down. But I was not going to commit myself in an argument before I had had an opportunity of forming a judgment, and I begged at once to be allowed to go to Mrs. Weir.

"Presently. My Aunt must not be taken by surprise," was the answer; but I repeated my request, "If I may but be allowed, Ma'am, I should like," I said, "to see Mrs. Weir in her natural state, as I cannot suppose that, in her present condition, any person's presence would have much effect upon her." And as I made a movement towards the folding door, Mrs. Temple no longer opposed me.

I found Mrs. Weir sitting in a small, darkened bed-room, close to the fire, wrapped up in shawls, — her eyes fixed, and a settled melancholy in her features. I had often seen her so before, but only for a short time. "Now," Mrs. Temple whispered to me, "she is always so, except when she is crying." I went up to her and spoke, and she looked at me, and answered, quite recognising me, but not as if she was surprised, or pleased, or in any way excited by seeing me; and presently, as I said something to Mrs. Temple, thinking to attract her attention, she began again the moaning sound which I had heard through the folding doors. Mrs. Temple pointed to a tray on which lay the untasted dinner, and observed, "There is no making her eat, she has tasted nothing all day." I did not make a direct reply, for I felt it must be bad for Mrs. Weir to be talked of helplessly as a third person, so I addressed her naturally.

"Dear Ma'am," I said, "your dinner is ready and growing cold; suppose you were to move your chair, and come to the table, and if we were to draw up the blind, there would be a little more light. It is such a dark afternoon, and London is not so bright as Stonecliff, is it?"

It seemed to me as though the poor lady was quite unused

to be spoken to cheerfully. She turned towards me with a kind of wonder, and when I said, "Now, Ma'am!" and moved her chair a little, she made no objection, but suffered me to wheel it round.

Mrs. Temple put in a word. "Well, Aunt! I am glad to see you do as the doctor tells you."

Mrs. Weir looked up pleadingly, "I don't want to eat, Ursula; only they will be angry."

"Oh, dear Ma'am!" I said, "no one will be angry, and you need not eat at all, unless you fancy it."

"You are wrong, Miss Grant, quite wrong," exclaimed Mrs. Temple, "she must eat."

"Mrs. Weir likes little odd things, at odd times, I know, Ma'am," I said. "I dare say she doesn't fancy her dinner just now. Should you like to hear how long I have been on my journey, Ma'am?" I added, addressing Mrs. Weir again; and without waiting for an answer, I went on, in the old fashion, telling my story. I saw that Mrs. Temple thought me nearly as much out of my senses as Mrs. Weir could be, for I described every little trifle, in a manner so minute and particular, as to a person in an ordinary state of mind must have seemed little short of absurd.

But I gained my point. Mrs. Weir listened, and at last said of her own accord, "You have been a long time without eating, Ursula, are you not hungry?"

I was terribly afraid of taking a liberty, but I ventured to say "If I might be allowed to have a biscuit, Ma'am, I think I should like it."

A plate of biscuits was on the table, Mrs. Temple pushed it towards me, she could do no less, and then I went a step further. "These are such very nice biscuits, dear Ma'am," I said; "quite like those we used to have at Dene; don't you remember them?" I handed her the plate, and she took one, not from liking or wanting it, but I had touched her curiosity. She would not try a second time, but the spell was a little broken; she felt that she could eat; her existence was not quite so unnatural. For that, I had little doubt, was the

secret of her morbid and melancholy silence. She had been treated as though unlike every other person, unable to determine or think for herself, and requiring authority to control her weakness of mind, and at length the evil which was to be averted was actually almost produced. I do not mean to say that there were not circumstances which aggravated the misery of her state, or that it was one which might not easily be mistaken; a very little observation showed me that Mrs. Weir had gone many degrees back in her condition as a rational being since I last saw her at Stonecliff; but I still believed that the mischief was more in the management than in herself. I question whether any of us, even in the soundest state of mind, if told we were in danger of losing our reason, and treated accordingly, would not finally be brought to the point of insanity; and Mrs. Temple, partly from impatience, partly from wrong judgment, had allowed herself to speak of Mrs. Weir, before her, in a way which so strongly implied her having no power of judgment upon any point, that Mrs. Weir herself believed it, and even alluded to her own state as one which must end in a still stricter control.

I am not going to detail every little thing that Mrs. Weir did or said in this our first interview, or every method I took to shake her from her morbidness; it would be only tiresome; and, moreover, I have no such faith in my own knowledge in these matters, as to be at all sure that I acted always judiciously. On the contrary, as I sat with her that afternoon trying all kinds of experiments, sometimes succeeding, and very often failing, I was more than once inclined to think that I was going on a wrong system: or that, at any rate, if my efforts were based on a right foundation, they were attempted too late to be of use. Between seven and nine o'clock Mrs. Weir went back to her old moaning state, only now and then stopping to cry bitterly, and say that she had neglected all her duties, that God would never love her, and that every one had left her; and then wandering off into some strange fancies, in which I, who knew her so well, could trace an association of ideas of things which had struck her in her

reading, especially in the Bible, — all connected with her over-scrupulousness of conscience, — but which, certainly, to any person hearing only the disjointed sentences, would have sounded very much like the dreamings of a bewildered mind.

It was a sad, sad evening. When I saw Mrs. Weir asleep, about half-past eleven, quiet and peaceful for the first time for so many hours, I could scarcely have grieved if I had been told that she was never to wake again.

CHAPTER LXIII.

Mrs. Weir rose very late the next dey. I saw John Hervey in the morning, and heard that he was to leave London in the afternoon. He was in a great hurry, and we said only a few words about Mrs. Weir. He begged me to stay as long as I could, and promised to ask Mary Kemp to help Jessie with advice as to how to manage things at Sandcombe. I did not tell him how earnestly I wished Mary could give advice upon other and more important matters. Before he left me I sent an affectionate message to Mary, and told John I was glad he was going back to her, and he owned that it would be a comfort. It was pleasant to think that there were at least two persons in the world likely to be happy that day. Mrs. Temple kept herself aloof from me, and it was awkward enough in the morning, for I did not know where to sit or what to do; but after Mrs. Weir was dressed, and when Dr. Green had paid his visit, I was told that I was to remain in Mrs. Weir's room, and I accordingly took my work there, and also finished a letter I had begun to Jessie. Mrs. Weir was not much better than when I first saw her. She sat by the fire, as on the preceding day, not working or employing herself, but following out my idea of taking every thing naturally; I made no remark upon this, but only told her that I had to send a letter home, and hoped she would not think I was taking a liberty in writing it in her room; and then I left her for a while to herself.

Perhaps it was a good thing upon the whole that I was hurried and interrupted in my letter to Jessie; it made what I said more forcible, and prevented me from enlarging upon facts which might have irritated her. All I could say was that I had noticed some things which had made me unhappy and uneasy, because I could not understand them, that if I did her injustice in thinking she had any thing upon her mind, she must forgive me; but that I earnestly entreated her, if she had, to tell me what it was, that at least I might comfort her, even if I could not advise her; and then I mentioned what I had heard and observed on the night of the party. I said nothing about her telling Roger, for I knew I should only have a vague answer, and that it never would be done; but I did hope that she might possibly place confidence in me. I concluded very affectionately, and assured her that her happiness and Roger's would alone have induced me to enter upon the subject.

I don't think I had much hope of obtaining a satisfactory answer, but I had eased my conscience, and I was then able to give my undivided attention to Mrs. Weir. I must add, however, that I enclosed a note to Roger, telling him all the particulars he would want to know, besides the few facts I had written on the preceding evening, and adding, that my letter to Jessie was on a little business, and I did not wish him to see it. That was, to my mind, the safest way of dealing with a reasonable being like Roger, who must know that cases might arise in which things could be said to his wife which could not be mentioned to him.

Before the close of that day I saw clearly that I could not hope to return to Sandcombe as soon as I had intended; at least if I was to be of any permanent use to Mrs. Weir. Dr. Green thought her better, more interested and collected in manner, when he talked to her; but he said, what we all knew, that any thing like recovery would be a work of time. He told me, when I happened to see him alone, that he saw I was exercising a good influence, and he begged me to stay. He said the same to Mrs. Temple afterwards, but she would

not second his words. The moment she felt a little less anxious, the old jealousy and dislike began to return. John Hervey, before he left me, had promised to see Mr. Macdonald, and obtain from him the information which I had failed to extort about Mr. Weir, as we both agreed that we must get Miss Milicent back at all hazards, as soon as she could leave her father. I sat in Mrs. Weir's room all the morning, but in the afternoon I left for about an hour, and went out. The change was desirable for her and for me. She did not like my leaving her, which I thought a good sign. Mrs. Temple gave me a commission for a knitting-box, and I contrived that she should talk about it before Mrs. Weir, and made some difficulty in the matter of choice, merely to prolong the conversation. I wanted to let a breath of fresh air into the shut-up mind. Afterwards, when I returned, I brought three or four boxes to look at. Mrs. Weir did not seem to remark them when I laid them near her, but when Mrs. Temple had made her choice, she asked to see it, and said it was pretty, and the words were like music to me. At the time when I had noticed, the evening before, that her spirits began to fail, and her mind to grow weak and confused, I begged Andrews to let me have my tea, and, seeing me enjoy it, Mrs. Weir was persuaded to take a little herself, and I am sure it did her good. She kept up much longer, and liked, I saw, to hear me talk, and when at length she grew tired, and began to cry, and say strange wandering things, I stopped her, by proposing to read a Psalm to her, and then the maid came and she went to bed. But how long was this state of things to last? and what could I decide upon doing?

I worried myself with the question at night, and in the morning felt how worse than vain and useless had been my perplexity.

Three letters were brought to me; one from Jessie, one from John Hervey, and a third from Miss Milicent. Jessie's was opened first, and with a trembling hand.

"My dearest Ursie, — It is very kind in you to write to me,

and if you were here, perhaps, I might be able to talk to you, for I am not very happy, but you know I cannot express myself in a letter; I have not been taught how; and I dare say I shall do very well, and when things are gone by there is not much good in saying any thing about them. I have had a bad headache all day. Roger is gone to Hove. Esther broke a glass bottle this morning. Two of the little chicks are dead, we cannot think how. I am your very affectionate sister,

"JESSIE GRANT."

Little comfort indeed there was in that! The words "not very happy" went to my heart. But writing was evidently useless. I had forgotten that Mrs. Weir had taught me to express myself easily and correctly, and that Jessie had had no teaching at all. To think of gaining her confidence by letter was like seeking to obtain entrance into a blocked-up house. I turned to John Hervey's letter; a feeling, which I could not explain, made me keep Miss Milicent's to the last.

"Dear Ursie, — Mr. Weir is lying ill at a little inn, at a place called Andely, in Normandy; that will be Miss Milicent's address. I can get nothing out of Mr. Macdonald, but I begin shrewdly to suspect that he and Captain Price have money embarked in the same speculations as Mr. Weir, and that the object in keeping Miss Milicent there is to persuade her to throw her little fortune into it, which she is as likely as not to do. I hope some one will be able to interfere, though I don't see how it is to be done, unless she can be brought back to England. I only saw Mary for a minute last night; she is very well, and will be much cheered by news I have had. I trust you are getting on well. In haste, very sincerely yours,

"JOHN HERVEY."

That was easy to comprehend, except, what did he mean by the news which had cheered Mary?

Miss Milicent's letter was less scrawling than usual: the date was Andely: —

"Dear Ursie Grant, — I have had two letters from you, both at one time. French people don't trouble themselves much with the post. My father is very ill, and I can't come home any how. We left Paris about a month ago, and have been at a great many places since, but now my father is so ill, we can't move about. He has a fever; the doctor, I think, says he is better, but he talks odd French, and as I am not well up in the language, I don't always understand him. I wish my governess had taught me French better, but she didn't know I should go abroad. If my father doesn't get better he must get worse; that is why I should be glad to have a friend here, but there is not any woman I know in France who would come; indeed, I don't take to women generally, and have made most friends with men. If my mother's trustees, who are always troublesome, were here, I should like to talk to them. There are ways of making money in France which there are not in England. My mother would do well to think of this. Perhaps, if you were to talk to her about it, it might rouse her up. I always found that when we settled up accounts, she put herself more in a fuss than at other times. I like French ways, they are so independent. The other day I sat down on a box at the railway station and mended the braid of my dress, and nobody looked at me. I sit up with my father at night; it is very lonely. I am sorry Matilda Temple worries my mother so much; I always knew she would. My father might have done without me at Paris, but he could not here, so it is all well I came. He was very kind, and took me travelling about to see Normandy. We walked a good deal, which is how he caught the fever. I think when he gets better we may go into Brittany. He will want change, but if I am to stay with him I must have that money my aunt left me put into my own hands. I mean to write to the lawyer about it. I don't think my father is so well to-day. You will see why I can't come home. Mr. Macdonald wrote to my father lately on a little business; he says he often sees you and your pretty sister-in-law. People said she would have married him if she had not married your brother. But she has made the best

choice, for Roger Grant is an honest man. I keep my eyes and ears open, as is necessary, and I am never taken in by any one. Good-bye, Ursie Grant; you must quite see why I have done right, and I shall be obliged to you to write and tell me so.

"I am your sincere friend,

"MILICENT WEIR.

"P.S. — I only want to be in England for a doctor for my father. I never was down-hearted before, but this is a very out-of-the-way place. I shall write to my mother, and tell her about my father, and that will explain all. He has been talking of her, and sent her a message."

I had this letter open in my hand, when Mrs. Temple knocked at my bedroom door and immediately entered. Her quick eye caught the handwriting directly.

"You have had a letter, I see, from Miss Weir."

"Yes, Ma'am; she informs me Mr. Weir is very ill, and says that she intends writing to Mrs. Weir. May I ask if she has done so? Miss Milicent tells me that her father has been talking of Mrs. Weir, and has sent her a message." I came to the point at once; it was the only way in dealing with Mrs. Temple, to take her unprepared.

She hesitated, stammered, began a negative, then suddenly changing her tone, said, in a confidential tone, "I think, — yes, I believe, there may be a letter; but in Mrs. Weir's present state, it will not do to alarm her."

"Perhaps, Ma'am," I said, "being alarmed may do her good."

"Oh, no! impossible. With her shattered nerves, quiet is the one important point. I could not answer it to Doctor Green."

It was an opportunity for being bold, and I was resolved to take advantage of it. "If you will excuse my saying it, Ma'am," I replied, "it seems to me that quiet has been tried upon Mrs. Weir already, without much effect. What comes in the ordering of Providence may be better for her than any plan of ours."

"But Mr. Weir is ill you say; surely you don't intend to take upon yourself the responsibility of telling Mrs. Weir. If you do, I put the case out of my hands entirely. I will have nothing to do with it, — nothing. It is the height of imprudence; I must send immediately for Dr. Green."

"I have no wish to tell Mrs. Weir any thing, Ma'am," I said; "but if I were left to myself I should take what seems to be sent in a natural way; and as Miss Milicent has written, I should give the letter."

"Milicent's letter! — and with a message in it! — Mrs. Weir will be frantic. She will say instantly that she must go."

"And I should let her go, Ma'am."

Mrs. Temple turned away from me and walked to the other end of the room. Then facing me suddenly, she said, "And who is to go with her?"

I made no answer, for I could not think of one.

"You see!" exclaimed Mrs. Temple, "it is an impossibility; it has been so from the beginning. People have taken upon them, I know, to condemn my course of action; things have been said, — very unkind things, — unjustifiable;" — and she fixed her eyes upon me, — "but the moment any other course is proposed, insurmountable difficulties are discovered. Mrs. Weir is but a child, and must be treated as such. She is worse than a child, indeed; there can be only one end to this sad business. Miss Grant, you are but playing with Dr. Green, in pretending that you can do any thing. You know as well as I do how long this evil has been going on; the sooner Mrs. Weir is placed under strict control, the better it will be for herself and for her friends."

I had scarcely listened to the greater part of this tirade, my thoughts had been centred on one point. When Mrs Temple had finished I made no reply, beyond remarking that I hoped the case was not quite so sad; and assuring Mrs. Temple that I would take no responsibility on myself without Dr. Green's permission, I begged her to excuse my leaving her, and went down stairs to Mrs. Weir.

As I sat in the room working, and trying to talk, my mind was revolving the difficult answer to Mrs. Temple's question. It was one for which I felt I must be prepared before I could urge my wish with regard to the letter. Certainly to tell Mrs. Weir that her husband was dangerously ill, and then to shut her up as before, would be merely driving her frantic. But on the other hand, to keep the intelligence from her, and at last perhaps have to inform her that he was dead, was a probability frightful to contemplate in its effects. Mrs. Temple's objection I believed to be based principally upon an obstinate belief in her own system. In Mrs. Weir's present state it could no longer be a point of importance to keep her in the house. She was an incessant anxiety, and medical expenses were running away with any advantage that might be expected from sharing housekeeping. The one natural way of solving the difficulty would be to offer to go to France myself; and a short time before, I should have proposed it without a moment's hesitation. But through all this painful time of trouble on Mrs. Weir's account I had one thought, more painful, more anxious, than any other, — it concerned Jessie. To picture her as unhappy, awoke a feeling which I scarcely knew to exist. She had become dearer to me than I was at all aware of. Her gentleness had won upon me. Her very ignorance and seeming helplessness had formed a tie between us; above all she was Roger's wife, and now that the first bitterness of disappointment was over, that was a claim upon my affection which I could not but feel. I longed to be at Sandcombe again. Since the ice was broken, I thought I might work wonders with her, — console, advise, guard her, — above all, bring her to openness with Roger. If left to herself, I had fears of continued deception, thoughtlessness, extravagance, weak yielding to Mrs. Price's influence; all likely to lead to irretrievable mischief between her and Roger. Unhappy! so early in her married life! It seemed that I must go back to her. But it was not to be. Dr. Green came before I could make up my mind what was to be done. I saw him alone, and put Mrs. Weir's case before him. He took my view. There

was a visible improvement since my arrival; and he was inclined to think that it would be wiser to act according to the natural course of events. "No excitement," he said, "could be worse than the dreary melancholy into which Mrs. Weir had fallen. Of course, I was prepared to go with her, if she wished to join her husband." He took it as the simplest, easiest thing in the world, — as though I had no claim, or interest, or occupation, apart from Mrs. Weir. I believe he rather imagined — so little did he know of my circumstances — that I was accustomed to wait upon and manage persons whose minds were diseased. I did not contradict him, because I felt it would be hopeless to make him see as I saw; and when I hesitated, he was so surprised, and so hasty, that my courage quite failed me in talking to him, and I only stood still and listened to what he said.

Mrs. Temple came in, and the question was discussed with her, and being thoroughly provoked, she naturally threw all the burden upon me. "The idea was to her," she owned, "quite preposterous; but she could only bow to Dr. Green's opinion. As I advocated the scheme, and had so much confidence in my own powers, I was the fit person to carry it out. She wished it to be understood that it was entirely against her judgment, and from this moment she repudiated all responsibility as regarded Mrs. Weir. As for me, I was very young; I had no experience; I was perfectly ignorant of the French language; I was weakly indulgent in my treatment of Mrs. Weir: but it was useless to say any thing; in fact, all had been said that could be; but no one considered her opinion." I can't go on any further. Mrs. Temple talked for at least five minutes without pause, scarcely stopping to take breath. At the end of this time Dr. Green, who had become perfectly cool, whilst listening to her, remarked quietly, that I had shown so much judgment already, he could not believe but that I should be equal to any emergency. Mrs. Temple left the room haughtily, and he went on with some more inquiries and directions concerning Mrs. Weir.

But I was determined to make no hasty engagement.

I begged to be allowed a day to consider. "I was by no means prepared," I said, "to go abroad." Dr. Green thought that money was the difficulty, and assured me he would undertake that I should be sufficiently recompensed. But this was not in my mind for a moment; I only wished to see what was right. As I stood there, I began weighing the conflicting claims, especially considering whether it would be possible to find some one to take my place, when Mrs. Temple rushed into the room in alarm. Mrs. Weir had learnt the news, — her state of agitation was terrific, and we must go to her directly. She looked very much alarmed, and well she might be, for in her irritation and perverseness, she had pretended to misunderstand Dr. Green's intentions; and wishing, as she said, to have the business over, had given Mrs. Weir Miss Milicent's letter without any word of preparation or kindness.

I will not attempt to describe the scene we had to go through in consequence; it would be too painful. Mrs. Weir was thrown back to a state much worse than that in which I had found her. She could be calmed only by strong opiates. I had no longer any doubt where my duty lay. Leave her I could not, even to go back to Sandcombe for a day to see Jessie, and satisfy my mind about her. The journey to France was a last alternative, but it must be tried, unless I wished to have it upon my conscience that, by refusing to go, I had forgotten the kindness shown me in past years, and the hopes of assistance I had lately held out, and aided in shattering the little remaining strength of Mrs. Weir's mind. I was the person commissioned to tell her that she was going, and that I would accompany her. It was very touching to hear her — not at first taking in the possibility — saying "she was a prisoner; she was not fit to go about; and she was losing her senses, her niece had often told her so. But she should wish to go; and Mr. Weir, she thought, had sent her a message; only, she might have dreamt about him. And he was her husband, and God would wish her to attend to him; but then she *couldn't go.* Would God be angry with her because she

didn't?" And, at last, holding my hand very tightly, and saying, again and again, "I love you, Ursula; you are very kind to me, and you won't be angry with me. I love you very much; but I am losing my senses, and they will shut me up, and that will be best for me." And then crying so bitterly, that it made my heart ache to hear her. I began to feel at last as though we were really in a prison, and that nothing would go well with us till we were out of it.

Such an amount of business as I had then upon my hands would have made my brain nearly as confused as Mrs. Weir's but for Dr. Green's help. I think he saw plainly now how matters stood, and was prepared to find Mrs. Temple interposing difficulties, which it would be his business to overcome. The first thing he did was to find a trusty maid who understood French, and to put her under my authority. He gave me instructions himself as to passports, and railroads, and steamers, and hotels, and gave me full directions as to any medical care which Mrs. Weir might require. Mrs. Temple was seldom referred to, which I was sorry for, since it gave her a more bitter feeling against me, and induced her to worry her husband, who, in his good nature, and being rejoiced, I suspect, to be rid of Mrs. Weir, made himself very useful in messages and inquiries. We had what Miss Milicent would have called a very trying time; and, in the midst of all this external worry, I had my own secret anxieties which could be mentioned to no one. I wrote again to Jessie, urging her, by every argument and motive that I could possibly suggest, to talk openly to Roger as she would to me, and to throw herself entirely into his hands; and, feeling in my own mind, that my words would be without effect, I did what, under other circumstances, I should have shrunk from. I wrote to Mrs. Kemp, begging her, as she loved me, to keep her eye upon Jessie, and to interfere, if necessary, to guard her from the Dene intimacy, even at the risk of making Roger angry, and telling her that I had very serious reasons for this request. My words, I knew, would be open to misconstruction, and might increase Mrs. Kemp's prejudice, but

she was honest-hearted and very kind, and would act upon them. That was all I cared for at the moment. To Roger himself, I wrote chiefly upon business matters. He would understand, I knew, the pressing claims which had forced me so suddenly to leave all my duties. It would never cross his mind to blame me because he was inconvenienced. "I hoped," I said, "I should return soon, but, in the meantime, I thought that Jessie would manage tolerably well, if he could, for a little while, let her have some additional help in the kitchen, so that she might chiefly have to superintend and give orders." I said this particularly, because he was beginning to be anxious about her health. Next spring there might be a little Jessie, and I knew this fact would make him anxiously careful about her, and think she ought not to do any thing; whereas occupation would be the greatest safeguard she could have. I sent, also, a few lines to William, that he might not think himself forgotten; and I wrote to John Hervey, telling him all I thought he would wish to know, and adding a kind word about Mary. When I had despatched all these letters, I felt that my English business was done. I had then only to think of France and Miss Milicent, to whom I sent a few lines, telling her she might expect her mother very shortly, but that I could give her no fixed day for our arrival. Louise, the new maid, however, assured us that Andely was a respectable town, and we should be sure to find accommodation there. What was to be done afterwards depended much on Mr. Weir's state.

CHAPTER LXIV.

We crossed to Havre on a calm night. Mrs. Weir bore the journey to Southampton better than I anticipated; but she was very tired when we got on board the steamer, and I persuaded her to go to bed immediately. I found her docile as a child, and, generally speaking, with a clear comprehension of all that was being done and said; only, now and then,

especially when suffering from any kind of physical exhaustion, the nervous excitement returned, and she would talk hurriedly and incoherently. When this happened, I took no notice, except by giving her a soothing draught, recommended by Dr. Green, which quieted her for a time, and, indeed, put her into a kind of torpid state, but he had urged me on no account to use it often. "His hope was," he said, "that change of scene, and absence of mental worry, would, by degrees, in a measure restore her nerves, without any such assistance. She was likely to prove a good sailor. If she was not, it would do her no harm." The matter was indifferent to him, but it was not so to me, for, as I had never been on the sea before, I had great misgivings on my own account, and, feeling very dizzy and uncomfortable, it was no slight relief to me to see Mrs. Weir asleep in her berth, under the care of the new maid, Louise, and to be able to go on deck for a little fresh air myself. There were but few passengers, and scarcely any foreigners. No one came near me to interrupt me, and as long as I stayed on deck I really enjoyed myself. The sky was brilliant and cloudless; the sea so calm that one star was reflected in the water as though it had been the moon. I was more at peace than I had been since I left Sandcombe. I was not, inded, free from uneasiness, and that of a serious kind, but my home cares were necessarily, for the time being, put away, and the sense of powerlessness is sometimes a great rest. As it grew late I went down into the cabin. A berth had been provided for me just above Mrs. Weir's, and I clambered into it and slept, not a comfortable sleep, for the incessant noises of the ship disturbed me greatly, and whenever I woke certain very disagreeable sensations reminded me that I had better not attempt to move. But there was something in the novelty which lessened discomfort, and a strange, awful, yet pleasurable feeling, in looking out of the port-hole upon the wide waste of waters gleaming in the moonlight. It carried me back in imagination to St. Anne's Hill, and the times when I had looked from it upon the same sea, and thought it the

image of Eternity, and that unknown and endless existence seemed nearer to me than it had ever been before, for I felt that there was indeed but "a step between me and death." I woke very early, dressed myself quickly, and was prepared to wait upon Mrs. Weir before Louise, who was but a bad sailor, was able to leave her berth. The luggage was trusted to her, so she went on deck to look after it, and I persuaded Mrs. Weir to follow as soon as she could; but she shrank from the thought of strangers, and fancied it impossible to mount the narrow stairs. When at length I succeeded in persuading her, I regretted having done so, for the confusion was, to my inexperienced eye, hopelessly bewildering. We were just about to land, and some strange Frenchmen, with cocked hats, and swords, were on the deck, giving orders as if they were lords of every one, and people were calling from the shore, and answering from the ship, and rushing hither and thither, with boxes, bags, and trunks, and every now and then addressing me in sentences made up of two English words to six French ones. I could only obey Louise, who, at intervals, came up to us saying, "Sit still, sit still; don't be impatient," and I should have sat there till night if I had not been told to move, and so, I think, would Mrs. Weir, for she seemed quite cowed by the bustle. How at last we got on shore, and found a carriage, and were placed in it, with our luggage, I have never been able to tell. I only know that we did manage everything, and without much difficulty, and that we were driven through some narrow streets to the hotel which Dr. Green had recommended; and I know also that I could have been very much amused, that I was so indeed, at intervals; only I was so occupied in thinking of Mrs. Weir. It came over me, I remember, as we turned away from the port, and I looked back upon the sea which separated me from England, that perhaps after all we had made a mistake.

And certainly there was some reason to fear it that afternoon. Mrs. Weir was so tired and ill, it was useless to think of going on farther the same day, though we had landed about *seven in the morning*. Louise said she would require a rest

of several days; but I was sure that a settled delay in one place would increase her illness, unless she was actually unable, from bodily weakness, to attempt the journey. I nursed her all the morning, just as I should have done in London, reading her to sleep, and talking till I was nearly worn out; and it was not till late in the afternoon that I could leave her for half-an-hour, just to walk round the town and see what the place was like. But even that half-hour did wonders for me, — it was better than sleep, or reading, or anything that could have been offered me to distract my thoughts. It was like a new fresh life. The quaintness, and prettiness, and strangeness of everything, were a perfect cordial to my spirits. I went back to the hotel with all kinds of absurd things to tell Mrs. Weir, and feeling as though I had purchased a new book which I was sure would interest her; and by and by, greatly to my wonder, she made me push the sofa, on which she was lying, close to the window, that she might look out and see the curious things I had been talking about. Louise must have been quite surprised at my delight. She knew little about Mrs. Weir, and France was her native country, though she had lived chiefly in England. To me the sight of Mrs. Weir, pointing to a Normandy cap, worn by a peasant who passed underneath our windows, brought one of the most hopeful feelings I had ever experienced. Our next day's journey was by railway to Rouen. Dr. Green had recommended our trying short distances, so as to avoid over-fatigue, and to give Mrs. Weir an opportunity of becoming interested in the places we passed through. His advice was certainly wise, for on the second day Mrs. Weir was so roused by the novelty of everything, and so calmed by the thought that she was at length going to her husband, that she was at intervals quite as well as when I last saw her at Stonecliff. We arrived at Rouen early, and with her usual unselfishness, she made a point of sending me out; and I am afraid I took advantage of the permission to stay longer than I ought to have done, as it was nearly dark when I returned. But I left Mrs. Weir inclined to sleep, and Louise with her,

so that I was not anxious; and really the beauty and strangeness of the place made me quite forget how time went. I should have been frightened at walking about in a foreign town by myself, so the mistress of the hotel very good-naturedly sent one of her little boys, who had learned to speak a few words of English, with me; and, with his help, I made my way through numbers of narrow streets, looking into churches and public buildings as I went along, till I was in a maze of bewilderment and delight. All I really wanted was to have Roger with me, that I might now and then give vent to my excitement, and say, "Do look, how beautiful! or how droll!" I believe I did catch hold of my little companion once or twice, to his great astonishment. One thing, though, I could not reconcile myself to, and that was the dirt. Yet even that was unlike English dirt; if it had been, I don't think I could have endured to stay in the place. But it had a look of its own, quite different from anything I ever noticed, or could have imagined,—a kind of suitableness it was, which made me feel as though Rouen would not have been Rouen without it; and I laughed at it to myself as I walked along the street, and, when I went back to the hotel, tried to forget it. As to the churches, I can't in the least describe properly the effect they had upon me. Having seen nothing but Compton Church, and Hatton, except once, when being in London for a few days, I was taken to St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, they came upon me at first like buildings that could not belong to this world, — they were so vast and beautiful. Then as I hurried through them, such odd things struck my eye, — tawdry images, and little candles, and artificial flowers, and such a very dirty pavement, — I was quite surprised. Neither did I know what to make of the people who were in them; some seemed very earnest at their prayers, and others were looking about all the while they were repeating them. I thought that, perhaps, I had better not try and form any opinion, for it was impossible in that short peep that I could understand about their religion. I should have liked very much to stay and say prayers in one of the

churches myself, but I was afraid people would notice me; and I thought, too, that perhaps no one allowed to do so except Roman Catholics. As I could not speak French, and my little companion was only able to understand short sentences, it seemed better to leave the matter.

We were to start from Rouen about twelve o'clock the next day, to go by railway to Gaillon, and from thence to Andely. What kind of place this Andely was I could not make out. Louise declared it was "very well, very good, — I need not make myself to fidget, — we should get on beautiful." But then she had adopted this tone about everything we had seen since we landed in France. Even the dirt of Rouen was in her eyes sacred. My chief comfort was that Mrs. Weir was able to put up in a wonderful way abroad, with things which would have distressed her for days at home. The bodily fatigue, and the calmer state of her mind, caused her to sleep better; and this quieted her nerves. I was not going to allow myself to be anxious, for that would do no good; and moreover, I trusted implicitly to Louise. At the railway stations she managed everything; I only undertook the charge of Mrs. Weir. So it was that the next day, when we were prepared to set off, I left the luggage in her care, and sent her off to have it registered before Mrs. Weir and I arrived. Greatly to my annoyance, I found her at the station gossiping with some friends whom she had met. I disliked the notion of her having any acquaintances; but I could not exactly find fault. She assured me everything was right, and I took my seat with Mrs. Weir, leaving Louise to follow in a second-class carriage. I don't think a railway journey is ever pleasant; and it was provoking to find everything abroad so much like what it is in England. Mrs. Weir had little to amuse her, and sat quiet, with that depressed air which I so much dreaded. I tried to attract her attention, but she did not care for the view, which was very pretty, though we passed through the country so quickly that the pleasure of looking at it was much lessened in consequence. We went along the banks of the Seine, which wound in and out so that we could not always

tell on which side the railway was carried. A range of low hills bordered it on the left bank, and there were openings between them, showing glimpses of what I thought would be very lovely valleys; but wherever there was any cultivation the country looked dreary from the absence of hedgerows; and there was a want of trimness in the way the land was farmed, which I was sure would shock Roger's eye. Besides, I did not at all like the little long strips of fields, like cottager's gardens. It did not seem as though there could be any people in France holding the same place as Farmer Kemp, and William, and Roger. But there again, as it was with the churches, perhaps I was no judge about it. Louise told me that people in France are obliged to divide their property equally amongst all their children, or at least, I believe, the eldest son has two shares. The notion of an equal division pleased me at first, it seemed so just; but when I thought it over, it seemed as if, in the end, the property which a person might have would be cut up, and the portions become less and less, until all would be poor together.

The distance to Gaillon was not great: when the train stopped, I got out quickly, collected the cloaks and shawls, helped Mrs. Weir to alight, led her to a seat, and then looked up for Louise. She was standing quite calmly waiting for I knew not what. The train rushed off. I went up to her, "Louise, where is the luggage?"

"Oh! quite right," was the reply, "it is always right in France." I turned away contentedly, but recollecting that we were not to stay at Gaillon all night, I went back, and asked, where we were to find a carriage to take us on to Andely.

"It will come quite in time, don't trouble yourself, there is one in communication," and Louise walked away from me, and began talking to a Frenchman. I was not satisfied, there was no sign of either carriage or luggage; Mrs. Weir was beginning to feel chilly, and in spite of the commendations of Louise, I felt in my own mind that a French railway station is not always as comfortable as an English one. I put a cloak round Mrs. Weir, and then looked again at Louise, her coun-

tenance expressed the utmost consternation. She rushed up to me, wringing her hands. "Ah! the luggage! the luggage! it is gone, the stupid wretch, not to have known — not to have heard! I told him."

"Who? what?" I exclaimed, "The luggage gone? you told me it was all right."

"Yes, right, it is right; it was registered for Paris. It is gone there."

I did not in the least understand, and it was some time before I could be made to do so. Louise, in her inexcusable carelessness, had told one of her friends to have the luggage registered instead of attending to it herself. He had blundered, and thought from something she said, that she was going on to Paris; so the luggage had not been taken out at Gaillon, and whilst we were standing and quietly looking on, our boxes and bags were rushing away from us at the rate of twenty miles an hour. I believe what aggravated Louise more than her own folly, was my stupidity in not being able to make out why the registering was of such consequence. French railways were things I was only just beginning to comprehend. For the future, however, I felt I must exert myself, and learn to manage matters my own way, so I left Louise to meditate upon her provoking negligence, and explain to the station-master that he must telegraph for the luggage, and walked away to see what hope there might be of finding a carriage to take us on to Andely. A very tiny omnibus was standing at the station; by it was an old sunburnt, grey-headed Frenchman, dressed in a kind of blue smock-frock, with a long whip in his hand. My heart sank. Louise came up. "Is that our carriage?" I asked.

Oh! yes, a very good carriage; what can be expected better at a country station? You have always omnibuses in England."

Very true, but Mrs. Weir was not accustomed to travel in them. The old man pointed to the vehicle, intending we should get in. Louise was about to do so, but I stopped her. "I don't think it will do," I said; "I don't think Mrs. Weir

can go in that thing, and no luggage, and not knowing what sort of place Andely is. She can't do it." Misfortunes seemed to crowd upon me, and I could have found it in my heart to begin reproaching Louise again.

"You will find nothing else," said Louise; "there is not a carriage to be had," and she appealed to a man near her, who went forward and opened the omnibus door to assure me there was no alternative. There really was no time for deliberation. We might perhaps have slept at Gaillon, but if the luggage did not reach us, what should we do? and at Andely, there would be Miss Milicent to help us. I did not suggest a difficulty to Mrs. Weir, for I had found by experience that it was a bad plan, but going up to her, I said, "There is a strange little carriage waiting for us, dear Ma'am, I am afraid it won't be very comfortable; but we shall soon be at Andely now, it is only a few miles."

She was too tired, and too depressed, even to answer me, but taking up her travelling bag, she put her arm within mine and walked very slowly to the omnibus. I saw she moved feebly, and it struck me that perhaps after all we had better not go on, but when I just said to her, "Suppose, Ma'am, we ask if we can have beds here?" her face of distress made me feel that it would not do to suggest it. All that tiresome railway journey and the delay had given her time for thought, which was the worst thing she could have. We drew near the omnibus. I was about to help Mrs. Weir in. A Frenchman's head peeped out, then another, and another; we were actually to travel eight inside. And the men were stout farmers, a greater perplexity to me than any thing I had yet seen in France, my notion of a Frenchman having always been that of a skeleton, kept alive by thin soup and sour bread. It was not chilly in the omnibus; I let down the window to admit a little fresh air, and my French neighbour immediately drew it up again, and when I appealed to Louise to explain that it was bad for Mrs. Weir, she said it was no *use, French* people did not live in draughts like the English. *We waited* at the station I suppose for outside passengers,

till I was quite tired, but at last the horse neighed, and the driver smacked his whip, and shouted and yelled, and off we set, jolting over the rough road.

Mrs. Weir's pale face of endurance made my heart sad; the heat was becoming very oppressive, and I had a dread of her growing faint. We had gone but a very little way, when we stopped at the bank of a river, the Seine, as Louise informed me. What was to be done then? Even Mrs. Weir turned her head to look, but the old driver took it very composedly. A ferry-boat was waiting for us; omnibus and horse, and Frenchmen, and ourselves, by dint of pushing and pulling, and shouting, were all put on board, and launched forth into the middle of the river. How odd I thought it, how my mind turned to Sandcombe, and Roger, and Jessie, and Mary Kemp, and John Hervey, when I looked on the broad river, and then on my novel companions, and remembered that I was in the middle of the Seine, with Mrs. Weir under my charge, I need not attempt to say. Louise had sunk from irritability to sullenness, and was pondering, I hope, with repentance, upon her carelessness. Mrs. Weir was pale, and, I was afraid, frightened, for she held my hand very tight. The Frenchmen chattered fast, and at the highest pitch of their voices. There was no beauty in the river, nothing to divert one's thoughts from the unpleasant contemplation of the present and the future. But the crossing was the work of a few minutes, and once more on dry land, on we went again, jogging over a narrow cross-road. Presently we stopped at a small farm house, and a disagreeable looking man, not a gentleman, though dressed as if he meant to pass for one, came out. There was certainly no room in the inside, and I imagined there was not likely to be any on the outside; but he was bent upon having a place, and mounted to the top, much, I suspect, to the annoyance of the outside passengers, and certainly to ours, for the creakings and groanings of the poor little omnibus were alarming, and made Louise put her head out of the window and call out loudly to the driver, explaining *to me afterwards in English*, that she had told him we were all

going to be cracked. I had calculated upon our having about five miles to travel, and the distance might not really have been more, but the sight of Mrs. Weir's face made it appear double, and what was the more provoking, every now and then we came to what seemed the entrance to a village, but which proved to be nothing of the kind. Presently, one of the Frenchmen muttered something in a tone which was evidently meant for the company at large, and pointed to the window. I looked out and saw on the right some ruined walls and a kind of castle on the top of a hill, but there was nothing very remarkable in it, and my heart just then was set upon finding a comfortable house, and not a ruined castle, so I paid but little attention to it. Soon afterwards we did really arrive at a village. I begged Louise to ask the name of the place. It was Little Andely, and as Mrs. Weir heard the name she started up, drew her shawl round her, and taking hold of my hand tried to move, but we were to be disappointed again. Little Andely was not our place of destination. We saw passenger after passenger descend, and amongst them the ill-looking Frenchman, but our turn was not yet. We had still a longer distance to travel, and Mrs. Weir was too tired to be excited, when at length we did reach a kind of town, with some streets, and a few shops, and decent looking houses. We stopped at the door of a little inn. My first impulse was to rush in and ask for Miss Milicent, but alas! I had no French knowledge to help me, and I was obliged to trust to Louise. I had just helped Mrs. Weir out of the omnibus, and paid the driver, when she came back utterly disconsolate.

"No one knew anything of Miss Milicent or Mr. Weir, or any English; it was all a mistake, and we had left England for nothing."

I was thunderstruck, I confess, but I would not show it. Mrs. Weir clung to me trembling. I dreaded the effect of such news, but she did not seem to comprehend what was said.

"Take me to my husband, Ursula," she murmured. "Ask *these good* people where he is?"

Louise wished to explain, but I motioned to her to be silent, and led Mrs. Weir into the inn. We entered a small coffee room, decked out with prettily painted walls, artificial flowers, and a marble slab for a table. It was much better than I had expected, but Mrs. Weir could not remain there, and I told Louise that we must be shown upstairs. A bright looking French girl, with a very white cap, came forward to know what we wanted, and Louise followed her to see the rooms. Mrs. Weir sat down on a bench. I heard her repeating some verses of the Psalms to herself, yet in rather a wandering way, and then suddenly she turned to me and said, "My husband and Milicent will come soon, Ursula; you must tell them to come, then I shall go to bed."

I hoped she would not expect any reply, but she did, — her eyes were fixed anxiously upon me, and I was obliged to say, "I must go and find them, Ma'am. If you will lie down on your bed for a little while, I will look for them."

She trusted to me so implicitly that she was satisfied in a moment, and my conscience almost reproached me for deception. Yet, what could I do? and I was sure that we could not be quite mistaken. Some intelligence we must obtain before long. Louise returned saying that "the rooms were good — very good" — beautifully clean — quite like France; but there was rather a steep staircase to get to them. It was certainly steep, and very dirty too. So also was the passage, and it was a work of great difficulty to take Mrs. Weir to her room; which, however, when we reached it, was tolerably comfortable. Mrs. Weir lay down on the bed perfectly exhausted. I bathed her face with water, and gave her Eau de Cologne; but the very first thing to be thought of was something in the way of refreshment, and I sent Louise to order some coffee for her directly, whilst I gently prepared her for the fact that Mr. Weir was not in the house, and that further inquiries must be made respecting him. I found, as I had always done, that the shortest and simplest way of proceeding was the best. Mrs. Weir, with all her eccentricities, was still to be governed by reason and truth, and I said to her that

"God had sent her a trial, for that we had made a mistake in coming to this inn. Mr. Weir was elsewhere, but we should, I hoped, soon find out where. In the meantime she might know that she had done her duty in trying to join him. No doubt we should soon learn where he was." She was distressed, as I feared she might be, but to be told that she had done her duty was strengthening to her. She said to me, in a feeble voice, "Yes, Ursula, I tried to do my duty; my niece told me it was not my duty, but you thought it was, and Dr. Green too, and I am come. I think I will try to sleep; when you have found my husband you will wake me."

Whatever the end might be that was better than the mournful depression, and though a foreboding of sorrow came over me, I had no regret for the step we had taken. Finding Mrs. Weir so quiet, I left her for a few minutes, and went downstairs.

CHAPTER LXV.

I found Louise doing what I wished I had been able to do, asking questions which might lead to some information about Mr. Weir. She told me that she could learn nothing except that, a few weeks before, two gentlemen, one French and the other English, with an English lady, had passed through the town, and slept there one night. No one seemed to know what had become of the English people, but the Frenchman was staying at a farm-house, some way beyond Little Andely. The clue was worth something. I recollected the unpleasing looking man who had been our fellow-passenger in the omnibus, and thought he might be the Frenchman alluded to. Most probably also I should find Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent at the village through which we had passed; at any rate it was worth while to try. I asked if there was any carriage which would take Louise there; but we had arrived at a most unfortunate moment. A fair was being held at Vernon, a neighbouring town, and not a vehicle of any description was

to be had, except the little railway omnibus. The old conducteur, as I found he was called, came to my assistance; "he was going back," he said, "to the station, and should return. He would put Louise down at Little Andely, and call for her on his way back." Nothing could be better, and I hastened upstairs to Mrs. Weir, to comfort her with the intelligence, if necessary. I found her restless. She was over-tired, and wanted her coffee. I would not tell her what we were going to do till she had taken it. The peasant girl brought it up, without milk, in three small cups, — also three liqueur glasses and a bottle of brandy; all were set down on the corner of a deal table. I could have laughed heartily at the arrangement, but the suggestion was good. I poured a teaspoonful of brandy into the coffee, without telling Mrs. Weir what I was doing, and begged her to drink it like medicine. She was so docile, I seldom had any trouble with her on such points.

Very different from Louise; when I proposed to her to go in the omnibus to Little Andely, she flatly refused. "It was too late," she said, "and no use. The English people were not there; they would have been heard of if they were. She had been hired to wait upon Mrs. Weir, not to obey me; and she was very tired, and had a dreadful headache, — in fact she felt quite ill; and" — I was not inclined to hear more. I had but a limited authority, and no time to exercise it, even if I had not felt that Louise, from her knowledge of the language, was in a great degree my mistress. The omnibus was at the door, and the conducteur would not wait. Mrs. Weir, who had learnt what we wished to do, was becoming roused and uneasy by the discussion and the delay. She urged me to go myself, and there was no alternative. Not disputing the point with Louise, — for a dispute is generally a loss, unless you have the power of enforcing obedience, — I departed. A few words of French I did know; I had learnt them from a conversation-book, which I had studied at intervals during our short journey; and when I was set down at the door of a small inn in Little Andely, I was able to ask, though with what kind of pronunciation I will not say,

"Y a-t-il des Anglais ici?" My old friend, the conducteur, waited to hear the answer; he knew my errand, and was interested in it. But the reply of the landlord of the inn was long and utterly unintelligible. We stood looking at each other, making grimaces and signs. I opened my conversation-book. In my perplexity, I had a notion that if I could spell the English words to him he would understand them better, and I actually began pointing out the letters; and then left off, laughing at my own stupidity, and again put the question, "Y a-t-il des Anglais ici?" This time I had an English answer. The Frenchman from the farm-house made his appearance from some little salon near the door, and informed me that he spoke English well, and that he could tell me everything. What did I want? As to speaking English well, the gentleman was under a mistake, but it was well enough for my purpose, and I inquired directly for Mr. Weir. A change came over his countenance — distrust and uneasiness were shown. He began asking me questions, instead of replying to mine; but I would tell him nothing, not who I was, nor where I came from, nor whom I was with. I gave him no clue of any kind, only I said I must see Miss Milicent. He seemed more satisfied when I mentioned her, but he was still disinclined to admit me into the house. "Miss Weir," he said, "was gone out; she had walked somewhere; he thought it must be to Château Gaillard, the castle on the hill. He advised me to go after her;" and with a tolerably civil bow he turned away from me. If I had been confidential with him he might have told me all I wished to know, but I disliked his face. I felt sure he must be one of Mr. Weir's speculating friends, who were leading him again to ruin and dishonour. I would not trust him with the knowledge of what I had heard about Mr. Weir and his illness. Whatever there to was learn I would hear from Miss Milicent herself; and knowing that I could find my way to the castle which I had seen on our road from the railway station, I set forth by myself. It was but a little distance, and I soon reached the foot of the hill. The castle looked very different on a near approach — much grander than I had imagined.

It stood on a steep promontory; a winding path along the grassy hill led to the summit. I hurried up. If I did not find Miss Milicent there, at least I might discover which road she had taken. The ascent was difficult, and I was out of breath before I stood on the summit of the green hill, with the great keep of the castle immediately before me. But I could not pause to rest. Scrambling over the huge masses of stone, I made my way into the ruin; and, through the broken arch formed by the massive wall, looked down upon a scene so lovely that for the moment it took from me all thought of anything except its beauty. The strong foundations of the castle were partly cut out of the solid rock, partly built up with even masonry. At its base lay the little village of Andely, and beyond flowed the Seine, crossed by a suspension bridge, and winding its way through a bright valley bordered by low hills. The glorious colours of sunset were lighting up the wide expanse of the sky, and steeping the atmosphere in a rich glow which seemed scarcely to belong to earth. It was a kind of magic picture seen through the framework of the ruined arch. I felt that the castle must have a history belonging to far-off ages, and in comparison of which my petty cares and interests must be worthless even in my own eyes. But I was not caring for myself then, I was thinking of and acting for others; and there is a greatness in that consciousness which renders even the smallest anxieties of moment. Even at Château Gaillard, after the first burst of admiration, I thought only of Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent. I turned from the view, walked round the walls, peeped into caverns which might have been dungeons or stables, and at length, on a point of the hill overlooking the road by which I had ascended, stumbled upon a person dressed in a stuff gown, red handkerchief, and straw bonnet, standing with her hands in the pocket of her cloth jacket; — Miss Milicent, — the same, precisely the same, so it seemed to me, as when we had parted on St. Anne's Hill. We recognised each other at the same instant.

I thought she might be startled, but no, she merely tossed

up her arms with a momentary surprise, and came up to me, holding out both hands. "Ursie Grant! where have you dropped from? I am glad to see you. You have come when I was looking for you;" and she shook my hand almost painfully in her heartiness.

"How is Mr. Weir?" was my first hurried question.

She did not answer it. "You are come alone, to be sure," she said.

"No," I replied. "Mrs. Weir is at Andely."

Miss Milicent's countenance expressed great consternation. "I wrote you word, Ursie Grant, that Andely was not a place for my mother; I said you were to keep her at Rouen. You have done wrong."

Miss Milicent might have written, but certainly I never received the letter, and we had all trusted to Louise. I again inquired how Mr. Weir was.

"As ill as he need be, and better than I expected he would be. I would rather have had the Grand Turk here than my mother."

"Mrs. Weir is very quiet, and very easily managed," I said; "she puts up with things in a wonderful way. I don't think, Miss Milicent, you would have kept her away, if you had been with her."

"I don't know; you are all idiots. But I think, — yes, I am glad you are come, Ursie. I like women after all," and Miss Milicent's voice softened, and she put her hand on my shoulder with a movement as nearly caressing as any she ever indulged in.

"You have been very anxious about Mr. Weir," I said. "Is he out of danger?"

"Yes, so they say; and high time he should be. France isn't a place to be ill in, Ursie. They have no curtains to their beds. I don't care for that, but my father does; and — But where are you going to sleep to-night? There 's no room for you where we are."

I told her we were at Great Andely, and explained our misfortune about the luggage. She scarcely seemed to think

of that, but answered, "Not close, that's a good thing; but you blundered, Ursie, you had no business to come at all. People only put up with things here because they want to see this old castle. I have seen it now till I am tired of it. I had rather look over upon the sea from St Anne's Hill."

"Then why not come back, Miss Milicent?" I said; "you know you are wanted."

"You are a girl of no sense, Ursie Grant, you are always asking, 'Why.' Sensible people don't need to ask, 'Why;' they know without asking. There are more reasons than I can tell why I can't come home."

"Mrs. Weir's state is very sad," I said.

"You needn't tell me that, Ursie; you think it isn't upon my conscience, but it is. All I want to know is, which is one's right hand, father or mother, for that is to be the most valued."

She was bent upon standing on the defensive; I could not argue with her, and only asked some particulars of Mr. Weir's state. In her blunt, wandering way, she told me that he was able to sit up, the fever had left him, and he was suffering only from weakness; she hinted at mental worries, but was not open about them. When she last wrote, it seemed, Mr. Weir had been anxious about himself, and some feeling for his wife had touched him, and occasioned the message which had been sent. "But I don't know what he will say now," added Miss Milicent: "he is not prepared for her, and he takes things queerly; I can't at all answer for him."

"He will be in no mood to find fault with Mrs. Weir," I said, "when he sees her. She is greatly changed."

I think my tone must have struck Miss Milicent. She answered, "You didn't make me think that."

"I tried to do so, Miss Milicent. I have said everything I could think of to make you aware of it; but it appears to me that words have no meaning of their own, but only according to the mind of the person who receives them."

"You are right there; yes, you are right, certainly. But

I wish you hadn't come. My mother's whimsies won't be attended to by French people."

I answered, "Mrs. Weir has no whimsies, as you call them, left now, Miss Milicent. She has been trained to overcome them. Hers has been a hard life of self-denial of late."

"Ah! Matilda Temple! It's her doing."

"Is it?" I said; I could bear her blindness no longer.

She turned round upon me, sharply. "Have it out, Ursie. What is it you mean?"

"I would rather not tell you, Miss Milicent," I said; "I would rather you should come and see Mrs. Weir, and judge for yourself."

She shrank back. "My mother is my mother, Ursie, and I don't forget it; but I can't do for her what you can."

"Miss Milicent, you might, and you must. Excuse me for saying it. I have brought Mrs. Weir here. She is now in your charge."

She stamped her foot upon the ground. "Ursie Grant, you forget yourself. It is your own will, your own act and deed."

"I have followed medical advice," I said. "When Mrs. Weir is with her husband and her daughter, she ought to want for nothing."

Miss Milicent was silent for some seconds. She bit her lips and frowned. Then she said, shortly, "You go back, I suppose, by to-night's train?"

"No," I said; "I go back when I feel that I can leave Mrs. Weir with safety and comfort. When that will be, Miss Milicent, depends upon yourself."

Without replying, she turned from me, and descended the hill. I followed her. She strode forward for nearly a quarter of a mile. We were drawing near the village, when she stopped suddenly. "Who's doing your work at Sandcombe?" she asked.

"*It* is done as it can be," I said; "I have been obliged to *leave it.*"

Again there was a pause. I heard the sound of wheels, and saw the little omnibus coming behind. Miss Milicent looked back also. "That omnibus goes to the town, Ursie; I shall go in it!"

"So must I," I said; "I came in it; and, Miss Milicent, perhaps you would remember that Mrs. Weir is without her luggage, and looks to you for help." She made an impatient movement. "It's a blunder from beginning to end, Ursie; my mother ought to have stayed in England; I don't know what I can do for her." She stood in great perplexity; then hurried into the house, telling me to make the omnibus wait, — which, as I did not know what to say, was a difficulty; but the French stranger again came to my assistance. He appeared at the door full of civility: He was glad I had found Miss Weir. He wished he could have accompanied me in the search; what further help could he give me?

My short answers could not have been encouraging; but he would not be thrown back by them. After giving the message to the omnibus-driver, he again began questioning me as to my errand. Miss Milicent returned before I could answer, with a bundle in her hand. She passed the Frenchman as I thought rudely. "Monsieur Dalange, my father is going to sleep, and does not wish to see any one; I shall not be back till late." She peeped into the omnibus, saw it was empty, and motioned me to seat myself beside her. We drove off. Miss Milicent caught hold of my hand. "Ursie Grant, you are a hard judge, but you have done kindly by me. If I am odd and forgetful, I have troubles you don't know of; but I will see my mother. May God help her, and me, and all of us! Now don't talk to me, I must think."

And she did think, and bitter thoughts they must have been; for the hard lines of her marked features seemed to deepen with some intense inward feeling, whilst she clutched the handle of the carriage door, and leaned her head out of the window, striving, though in vain, to hide the signs of agitation. When we arrived at the inn, she scarcely waited for the omnibus to stop before she was out of it. I said to her

that I would go upstairs, and prepare Mrs. Weir for seeing her; but her impatience could with difficulty be controlled. She would not wait in the public room, but followed me into the passage. Louise, who did not seem to think that I had any cause to be annoyed with her, came out of Mrs. Weir's room, to tell me that she had been asleep, and was better; only she had been asking for me.

I forgot my anger, as entirely as Louise did its cause. Motioning to her to go into her own room, I went softly up to Mrs. Weir, who was lying on the bed, and was just beginning to tell her that I had been successful, — when a long arm was stretched across me, and Miss Milicent pushed me aside, and said, "You have had Ursie Grant long enough with you, mother. I am come to know myself how you are going on; and I have brought you a bundle of clothes;" and she tossed her parcel on the bed, and stooped down and kissed her mother, roughly indeed, but heartily. I dare say it was the best thing that could have been done. It was not arranged as I wished, but no doubt preparation would only have made Mrs. Weir more nervous. As it was, she was startled, and looked at her daughter, as though not quite recognising her; and the strange gaze had such an effect on Miss Milicent, that she turned aside and burst into tears.

"What does she cry for, Ursula?" said Mrs. Weir, recovering herself. "It is very kind of her to come, and it does me good; and now I will go to my husband." She sat up on the bed, and put out her hand for Miss Milicent to draw near.

"Mrs. Weir didn't know you, Miss Milicent," I said; speaking as naturally and brightly as I could. "You were taken quite by surprise, Ma'am, weren't you?" I added, addressing Mrs. Weir. "I found Miss Milicent wandering over the ruins of an old castle; she had gone out to take a walk; afterwards we met the omnibus returning from the *railway*, and so she said she would come back with me, and *see you* now; and to-morrow, or next day, you will no doubt

be able to see Mr. Weir, for he is much better, and able to sit up.

I think it must have been the mention of the omnibus which brought us all back to a natural state. Miss Milicent brushed away her tears, came up to the bed-side, and sat down; and Mrs. Weir leaned back again on her pillow. "If you will be good enough to tell Mrs. Weir what you have been doing lately, Miss Milicent," I said, "I am sure she will be glad to hear; and I will go and order tea, and perhaps, if you are not in a hurry, you will just be so kind as to put the table out, and have some with her; I will bring up another candle and make the room look comfortable." I said it all as if we had been at Dene, and there was nothing easier than to make things comfortable, but I had great misgivings as to how it was to be managed. One point, however, was gained. Miss Milicent and her mother were together, and I was sure that one interview, if only of five minutes, would do more to touch Miss Milicent's heart, than any description that could be given.

She came out to me, as I was standing at my bedroom door, having just given directions for tea.

"I can't stay with her, Ursie, she doesn't understand, and she's quite changed." Miss Milicent's face looked haggard.

"Mrs. Weir will be better," I said, "to-morrow. Everything that is new unsettles her."

"But you shouldn't have come; what shall we do here? How will she bear it? Ursie, you have much to answer for!"

"Not so much as if we had remained behind, and waited for the end, which must in all probability have come," I said.

"End! — what end? — what do you mean?"

"A lunatic asylum."

Miss Milicent covered her face with her hands, and groaned.

I *did not want to* distress her more than was needful. She

had taken an exaggerated view of the present evil, and no wonder. Mrs. Weir, when startled, took a long time to recover herself. She was not, by any means, as far from rational as her daughter thought; but, impetuous and ungoverned in all her feelings, Miss Milicent would not listen to me, or believe me. Yet she could not bring herself to look at the case boldly. Availing herself of the claim which, no doubt, Mr. Weir had upon her, she made it an excuse to hurry away. She would return, she said, to-morrow. She would see her mother again; she would arrange the meeting; she would do anything, everything I wished. But she could not bear the pain; she shrank from the responsibility. Even yet Miss Milicent had much to learn.

CHAPTER LXVI.

Mrs. Weir took it much to heart that her daughter had left her so soon, and I rather troubled myself as to how Miss Milicent would get back to Little Andely, but she knew the ways of the people, and it was a quiet part of the country; so I hoped she would not mind walking alone. But I was obliged to leave her to herself, and attend to Mrs. Weir, whose mind, I was sure, was in much perplexity. Happily, after a little quiet explanation, I was able to make her see how things stood. I told her plainly that Mr. Weir was at a neighbouring village, and that she might go to him the next day if she wished it; but I endeavoured to convince her that, as he was better, there was no hurry, and she need only remain quiet, and rest after her journey. She acquiesced for the time, but I could not say how long the mood would last. Mrs. Weir ate more for her tea than I expected, which was very satisfactory. Louise and I had a kind of supper in the public room downstairs, and were waited upon by the pleasant-looking Normandy peasant girl, who was overwhelmed with delight when she found that Madame liked the roast fowl which I took up to her, and was persuaded to taste the wood strawberries. We

might, certainly, have been in much worse quarters, for the people were extremely civil. About half-past nine I made Mrs. Weir comfortable for the night, and left her with the door between her room and mine open, and a little bell by her side, that she might call me if she wanted anything, and then I thought of rest for myself. But my troubles were not over, I had scarcely gone to my room when I heard sounds of merriment below, fortunately away from the side of the house adjoining Mrs. Weir's room, but very near to mine. I supposed there might be some late guests in the house, but when I lay down in bed the sound of a flageolet was added, and the people, whoever they were, began to dance. And such a noise as they made! — stamping, shouting, laughing, singing, clapping of hands — sleep was impossible. I lay awake, studying a book of French conversation, by the light of a tallow candle, till nearly two o'clock in the morning; then there came the roll of some vehicle to the door, and the dancers began to disperse, and I fell asleep. It must have been eight o'clock, and the sun was shining full into my window, when I was awakened by the touch of no very gentle hand.

"Ursie Grant, what makes you so lazy? I want to talk to you." I fancied myself at the Heath; and, as I rubbed my eyes, almost believed I should look out upon the cliffs and the sea. Miss Milicent quickly brought me back to reality. "I went off in a hurry last night, Ursie; I am come back to do better to-day, but my mother mustn't come to us. My father isn't in a state to bear it."

I could have wished that Miss Milicent had left me time to dress and prepare myself a little for the day's business, instead of thus thrusting it upon me, but perhaps that was more than I had a right to expect.

"I am afraid Mr. Weir is not so well," I said.

"I can't say; the long and the short of the matter is, Ursie, that I must talk to you."

She sat down, leaned her two elbows upon the bed, and disregarding every thought of convenience or comfort for me,

prepared herself to begin a long story. Louise was with Mrs. Weir, that was my only consolation, and I collected my largest stock of patience.

"You know, Ursie, matters are bad with us, and have been so for a long time. My father spent money faster than he got it. My mother had more whimsies than there were minutes in the year. I dare say I was not better myself. But people must live; my father must live. When he came abroad he took some money with him; they said he ought not to have done it, but he says he must have starved without it. Then he made friends, — whether they are friends or not I can't say, he calls them so; that M. Dalange is one. He engaged with them in a kind of wine business; I suppose it is speculation, but it seems all right enough to me. Mr. Macdonald and Captain Price have money in the same business, and they are growing rich. You see, Ursie, I couldn't come home, because my father's money was all gone in this business, and my money, which was sent to me, was all he had to live upon. That is how the case stood. I believe it would all have gone right except for Monsieur Dalange. I haven't any faith in him. I believe he is a rogue. But we aren't rich, though we thought we should be, and now all will go to the ground unless there is some help; and there is no one to help but me and my mother; and I think, Ursie Grant, it is a good thing you are come after all, though I didn't think so last night, for now you can persuade my mother to do what she should do, and give her assistance to get us all straight again. You see, when she has done this, things will go on well, and we can go and live where we choose. I think perhaps if we went to the Pyrenees it would do, for my father likes mountain air, and so do I, and my mother will be freshened by it."

If a gulf had opened beneath my feet, I could scarcely have been more alarmed than I was at the maze of wilfulness, folly, selfishness, — and I had great reason to fear, roguery, which this speech revealed to me. Miss Milicent fixed her eyes upon me, and when I did not answer, touched my arm: "*You* understand now, Ursie, don't you? It is all clear."

"No, Miss Milicent," I said. "I don't understand; or at least I hope I don't. Mrs. Weir has only just sufficient to keep her in comfort, and I believe you have not more. You don't mean to say that you would persuade her, or allow yourself, to risk money in schemes of which you know nothing, and conducted by such people as Mr. Macdonald, Captain Price, and this Frenchman, whom you own yourself, you believe to be a rogue?"

"But I do know about the scheme, Ursie. I have had the whole thing explained to me, and there will be profit for us in it, there must be by and by. Only just now help is wanted. You don't think me a fool: do you?"

I kept my thoughts to myself. "Miss Milicent," I said, "these are matters in which I can have no voice or judgment. As far as I am concerned, I can only say that to trouble Mrs. Weir with them might have most fatal effects. She ought at least to have time given her to recover herself, after the anxiety she has had; and then, the whole thing ought to be a matter of consultation with her friends and the lawyers. It is not for a person like me to interfere at all about it."

"But I hate lawyers," she exclaimed. "I have made a vow never to have anything to do with them. They are a greedy, grasping race, and I choose to settle my own affairs without them."

"Of course," I said, "no one can interfere with your own affairs, Miss Milicent, but Mrs. Weir's are different; and it seems to me, if you will allow me to say it, that we women sometimes make mistakes when we think we can engage in business which properly belongs to men."

"I don't know anything about, 'properly belongs,' I know what I have done and will do. Ever since I was twenty-one I took my own course, and I am not going to be fettered now."

"And do you have no advice?" I said.

"Yes, people who understand much better than lawyers would," she replied. "But ve won't talk about it, Ursie Grant; I see you put your face against it."

"Against mentioning the subject to Mrs. Weir," I said; "and indeed, Miss Milicent, you may think me taking too much upon myself, but if it came to the point, I would, upon my own responsibility, carry Mrs. Weir back to England this very day, rather than she should run the risk of having it named to her."

I was bold — almost to the point of impertinence, yet I knew well the person with whom I had to deal; — the will which could only be governed by an assertion of power beyond its own, but which was taken by surprise when that assertion was made, and sank beneath it almost without a struggle.

Miss Milicent was quite silent for some seconds; then looking up at me fiercely, she said: "It's a mess."

"Yes," I said, "a great mess, and Miss Milicent, if you trust to yourself to get out of it, you will only sink the deeper."

"And who is to help me out, Ursie? Not you — you wouldn't stretch out your hand to help a dog."

"It is a man's business, Miss Milicent," was my reply, "a man who has a head for figures, and could advise Mr. Weir and you, and be up to the arts of these people whom you suspect. A man it ought to have been from the first," I could not help adding.

She caught me up there. "I know what you mean — I know what you are always cutting at, but I don't give in. My father liked to have me, and we have had a good pleasant time, and shall come all right by and by — only —," a look of extreme perplexity came over her

"I am afraid things are awkward now," I said, venturing to complete her sentence.

"Yes, that's the whole of it, and if you can let me have five pounds, it can be settled between my mother's accounts and mine."

Poor thing! I felt for her deeply, for it was a great struggle, — she had such a proud spirit! and it was hard to be obliged to make the request to me.

But it was still harder to me to reply. "I am afraid, Miss Milicent, I have no money to give. I have only what may be wanted for Mrs. Weir's own expenses, and for that I am answerable to Mrs. Temple."

"Matilda Temple! control my mother's money—and mine! For it is mine, too! Ursie Grant, you don't know what you are saying."

"You left Mrs. Weir's affairs in Mrs. Temple's hands, Miss Milicent," I said.

She was stung to the quick. "And I was an idiot for doing so," she exclaimed. "But I trusted to you," she added, looking reproachfully at me.

"Indeed, then," I said, "you trusted to a person who had no power, and could have none. But Miss Milicent, it is not for me to show you where you may have been wrong; only, just at present, you will see yourself that my hands are tied, and if I wished it ever so much, I could do nothing for you."

"You don't wish it," I heard her mutter to herself, and I took up the words, and said:—

"You are right; I don't wish it."

She leaned her forehead upon her hands. I went on:—"If I could help you, as you ask me, it would only be help for the moment; and if you embark more money in these speculations, you will only, so it appears to me, run the risk of losing it. Indeed, Miss Milicent, I cannot but feel there is only one course for you, and I should think it would be the best for Mr. Weir; at once to send for some person whom you can trust, put everything into his hands, and be guided by his advice."

She looked up scornfully.

"And where am I to send? To the moon? Are wise counsellors to be had for the asking?"

"They won't be had without the asking," I replied; "and I suppose it needn't be a lawyer."

"It won't be," she said, nodding her head at me, with a kind of angry smile.

"Then it must be some one else," I said.

"And who?" She put the question triumphantly.

"John Hervey," I replied. I spoke on the impulse of the moment,—chiefly, I believe, because I had once before named him to Miss Milicent, and that he was always associated in my mind with the thought of Mr. Weir. I had no sooner mentioned him, than innumerable objections suggested themselves to me.

Miss Milicent was too angry to argue. "Pshaw!" she exclaimed. "John Hervey is your idol. Do you think my father would talk to him?"

I felt piqued. "John Hervey is an honest man," I said, "and has a good clear head for accounts; and he is one, also, who has been always accustomed to business, and has had a good deal of his own to manage, especially of late. I should think, Miss Milicent, you might go further and fare worse. At any rate, he is a friend, and a true one."

I touched her there. She gazed at me with moistened eyes, and said, "Ursie, if I believed that I should be thankful."

"He is one, most truly," I repeated. "He has been at the bottom of most of the thoughtful things which have been done for you and Mrs. Weir of late, Miss Milicent. If you could bring yourself to confide in him, you might bless the day on which we have had this conversation."

She stood up suddenly. "You have pens and ink, Ursie; where are they?"

"There is no hurry," I said; "surely you will go back and consult Mr. Weir."

"I will consult no one; I have had too much of consultation already. And that French rogue in the house, too, expecting to be told everything! John Hervey would be murdered before he got here, if it was thought he was coming."

I did not dread quite such tragic consequences; but I did see that it might be better not to put either Mr. Weir or his friend on their guard by letting the idea be known. Miss Milicent scrawled a few lines, and put the paper into my hands,

telling me that I was to write, and explain more fully. She had only said she wanted to see him.

"And where is he to come?" I inquired. "Here?"

"Here? No. Why should we stay here? When my father can move, we shall go back to Paris, — if we don't go to Brittany."

So wild and vague she was still, and there were so many questions to be settled! I made another effort after something definite.

"Mrs. Weir must see Mr. Weir to-day," I said.

"Well! Yes, I suppose so." But Miss Milicent said it unwillingly.

"But he must not mention money to her."

"I can't say. People are waiting to hear what we determine."

"If he does," I replied, "he will bring on an attack of nervous excitement, which may end no one knows how."

"I can't answer for him," was Miss Milicent's rather sullen answer.

"But you really must answer for him, Miss Milicent," I said. "What is the use of sending for John Hervey if you are to determine what shall be done before he comes? As for Mrs. Weir, she is not now in a state to form a correct judgment about her own affairs; and if anything is forced upon her now, I will be the person to come forward and say it is illegal."

Whether I had a right to threaten in this way I had not the least idea, but I was driven to it, and Miss Milicent, who was as ignorant as myself about all law matters, was frightened by it.

"We have no money for the present time, unless something is done," she muttered in an under tone. "M. Dalange will advance some when we have signed the agreement."

Her inconsistency exasperated and alarmed me; I said, "Miss Milicent, upon one condition I can help you, at least for the present. Let Mr. Weir engage that nothing shall be said to Mrs. Weir about money for the next three weeks, until, that is, she has recovered from her journey, and do you promise

yourself that you will enter into no engagement with these speculating men till you have seen John Hervey. Mr. Weir and yourself can in that case join Mrs. Weir, and your expenses will be paid by me, acting for Mrs. Weir, for the present, and can be repaid when your affairs are more settled. I think," I said, "I am not going beyond my limits by offering this."

A door of relief seemed opened, but it was to Miss Milicent rather than to me. At the moment, it seemed to me, that if I had had an idea of this troubled sea into which I was to be thrown, I never should have ventured to bring Mrs. Weir away from England.

Miss Milicent, however, saw everything by the light of her own eyes. She had come to me evidently in such perplexity, that the very thought of escape seemed the escape itself.

"If they could have present help, her father," she said, "would promise, — yes, she could make him promise, she was sure; he was in such a fret, he did not know how to get on from day to day, and he had been so ill, and was longing so to go back to Paris. Now we should all go there directly. And M. Dalange, — she did not know what could be done about him, but he must wait; she thought she could put him off, and when John Hervey came he would see things clearly, he would not be like me, afraid to risk a penny; and the money which was wanted would be advanced to M. Dalange, and the business would go on well, and they should all grow rich together."

I did not contradict her; I only tried to impress upon her more strongly, that nothing was to be said to Mrs. Weir, and afterwards I suggested as civilly as I could that she should leave me to dress. She went downstairs into the public room, for Mrs. Weir was not ready for her, and I dressed as quickly as possible, feeling half asleep, and extremely tired, but seeing a great deal of work before me.

CHAPTER LXVII.

I could never be said to have known Mr. Weir. When he was at Dene, I seldom even saw him latterly; when I did, it was rarely that he spoke to me. I had a strong prejudice against him, partly arising from his unpleasant manner, but more from all that I had heard of him; and when there is this kind of natural aversion, it is almost sure to be perceived and returned. And Mrs. Weir's arrival was the last thing which her husband was likely to desire. It would interfere with his plans and trouble his daily comfort; and he knew enough of my connection with his family to be aware that I had been instrumental in bringing about the meeting. It was not likely, therefore, that anything that I could do would find favour in his eyes. Most especially he was likely to resent the idea of my imposing conditions upon him. I felt my position to be extremely awkward, and with a feeling of nervous dread, such as I had rarely experienced, I found myself in the afternoon in a little shaky carriage, the only one which could be met with in the place, accompanying Mrs. Weir to pay the long anticipated visit to her husband. Miss Milicent, after seeing her mother for a few minutes in the morning, had gone back to prepare Mr. Weir for what was to come, and I would willingly have persuaded Mrs. Weir to wait till another day, but now that she was a little rested, her earnestness upon the subject was returning, and I dared not delay, especially as I had received a few lines from Miss Milicent, since our interview, telling me that her father had consented to the meeting, and gave his promise as I desired. Money must indeed have been much needed at the moment, or Mr. Weir would never have bound himself so readily to an agreement which stood in the way of his schemes, but having been given, I had no right to doubt that it would be kept.

Mrs. Weir herself was the greatest lesson I could have had upon the duty of simple faith, in times of difficulty. When I told her that the carriage was at the door, and that she was

going, I prepared myself to see her excited and agitated. But it was not so. She merely said, "I am ready, Ursula. God will help me;" and that was the first expression which gave me the idea of the fear which I am sure was at the bottom of her heart, even when she was most pleadingly bent upon joining her husband. She did not speak nor look about her, as we drove along, but kept her hand in mine, and I felt it tremble very much. At last, just as we reached the village, she said, "He will not be angry, Ursula, do you think so?" and when I answered lightly, "Oh, no! Ma'am, what could he be angry about?" she received my assurance with child-like submission, and never repeated the question.

Miss Milicent was waiting at the door to receive us. I had never seen her look so subdued, and I thought she had had a stormy morning. The inn was by no means so good as ours. It grieved me that Mrs. Weir should have to mount the narrow staircase, and I thought the stifling air would affect her breathing; but with my help she went up firmly, though slowly, only once or twice stopping and glancing round with rather a wandering, unsettled gaze which I did not thoroughly like.

"Here's my mother come, father," said Miss Milicent, throwing open the door of Mr. Weir's room. I was drawing back, but Mrs. Weir grasped my arm, and I led her into the room. It was tolerably large, but very scantily furnished. Mr. Weir was sitting by a stove, with an uncovered deal table at his right hand; his bed was in one corner in a recess. The cold, poverty-stricken air of the apartment was perhaps the more remarkable to my eye, because I was not accustomed to the French fashion of living without curtains and carpets; but it was not the room which fixed my attention, it was Mr. Weir himself. He was thin, and his face showed that he had been very ill. He wore a loose dressing-gown and slippers. His hair was long, and his beard had been suffered to grow; all these things make a great change in a man; but no such external differences could have given me the impression which I gained from his face. It was sunk, lowered. As Mrs. Weir,

in her most childish incoherent movements bore the tokens of a nature which must at last rise above human infirmity; so did this cold, selfish man of the world carry about with him the signs of one which must, except through some miracle of mercy, eventually fall below it. It was the first thing which struck me; yet he was a gentleman still. He rose when we entered, came forward, and kissed his wife, saying, "Welcome, my dear," and placed her in a chair by his side, making a distant bow to me.

There was a pause. Mrs. Weir looked at him steadily for a few seconds; then, turning round to me, asked, "Who is it?"

I could not answer.

"He is glad to see you, mother," said Miss Milicent, coming up to her.

"Very glad, my dear," said Mr. Weir. "Young woman," he addressed himself to me, "I forget your name, perhaps you will have the goodness to go down-stairs, and ask for a bottle of lemonade; it will refresh Mrs. Weir."

It was an excuse to send me away, and I was going, but I could not free myself from Mrs. Weir. "Is it he, Ursula?" she said, in a low voice; "it seems so long, I think I have forgotten; but he speaks kindly."

"Mr. Weir is very glad to see you, dear Ma'am," I said; "you know he has been very ill, so of course he doesn't look as you remember him."

"No, Ursula; but he may be angry with me. Perhaps now he would wish me to go back again, and I would do it. What God wills, I would do. Just tell me, Ursula, tell me."

I looked appealingly to Miss Milicent, but she was greatly distressed; I saw it by the way in which she bit her lip; she would not trust herself to speak.

Mr. Weir came to my relief with the cold polish of manner which I now so well recollected. "I can only be flattered by your having come so far to see me, my dear," he said. "It would be uncourteous to wish you to return. All I can regret is that I have not better accommodation to offer you; but per-

haps," he added, and he turned to me with a tone of proud indifference, "perhaps, if Mrs. Weir were able to remove to Paris in a few days, you might be able to find some more comfortable lodging for her. I suppose she is equal to the journey."

"Mrs. Weir will be ready to go wherever you go, Sir," was my reply. "It was her object in coming abroad."

"Certainly, certainly. I am not strong yet, but I think — Milicent, my dear, I leave you and this young woman to arrange your plans. When they are settled, I can fall into them."

"You will like to go to Paris, mother?" said Miss Milicent.

Mrs. Weir did not directly answer, so the question was impatiently repeated.

"Paris is not like this place, Ursula, is it?" said Mrs. Weir, giving her answer to me. "My husband has been ill. I ought to see that he is comfortable in France, but I do not know how. Will he —" her voice trembled and for the first time she addressed her husband directly: "George, will you come back to England?"

There must have been something in that familiar name, which touched with warmth even Mr. Weir's heartlessness. It might have been an association of by-gone years, of the days when his wife in her simplicity and childish awe, first ventured to address him by it; it might have contrasted with the hopes he had then given her, and the wreck of health and happiness of which he too well knew himself to be the cause. Be that as it may, he rose from his seat, drew near her, and taking her hand said, "England cannot be my home, my dear, but you must come and see me in France;" immediately afterwards, as though ashamed of having given way to that slight expression of feeling before me, he added in a light tone: "We have forgotten the lemonade. You must have some to drink to my better health; they have no wines fit for such a purpose here."

I was afraid to leave him, for I feared the subject he might

introduce; but I did him injustice. His word was given, and he would not have dared to break it. Yet no doubt for other causes he disliked seeing me in the room. I must have seemed to him a spy and an intruder. I disengaged myself from Mrs. Weir and went downstairs. M. Dalange was in the salon. The look with which he greeted me showed me at one glance that we were enemies. I curtsied to him, and having given the order for the lemonade, sat down. He drew near and addressed me in his broken English. He hoped I was well, not the worse for my late walk; he seemed as before determined to make acquaintance, but my answers were short. He was not, however, to be repulsed; after an observation to which I made no reply, he said abruptly: "We have a friend, known to us both, I think, — a Mrs. Price."

I replied that I knew Mrs. Price to speak to her, — I could not call her a friend.

"Ah! yes, I thought so." He did not appear to comprehend my denial of friendship. "Have you seen Mrs. Price lately?"

"I know nothing of her or her concerns," was the answer I longed to make, but an uneasiness I could not conquer led me to pursue the subject. "Not very lately," I said. "I have not been at my home for some weeks."

"Indeed! yet she interests herself much about you."

This really was too intolerable. Mrs. Price interest herself about me, and write or talk of me to this French stranger! It was an impertinence not to be imagined. I hope I did not quite show all I felt, and I know I tried to answer quietly, "I think, Sir, you are mistaken. Mrs. Price is a very distant acquaintance, and has no interest in me, and no concern in any of my affairs. There must be some mistake."

M. Dalange smiled sarcastically. "Oh dear, no; not at all. There can be no mistake. Surely you are friends. I think a sister of yours must have been staying in the house of Mrs. Price. Could it not be so?"

"I really don't know, Sir," was my reply, and I instantly rose, and left the room. I walked out into the road — there

was no other place I could go to — in a storm of irritated feeling. Whatever Mrs. Price had said about me must have been in reference to the speculations and Mr. Weir's affairs. She had no doubt a right to say anything she chose, but the mere fact of being talked of, or written about, by those one dislikes always, I think, seems an impertinence; and the manner adopted by M. Dalange increased my annoyance. A few moments' reflection convinced me that it would be foolish to allow myself to take offence, especially at a foreigner — a man whom I might never see again; but one fact remained, which reflection only rendered more anxious — communications were passing between Mrs. Price and Jessie. There was no end to the intimacy. Stay at Dene she could not, I was sure. Roger would never allow it. But some intercourse there must be, and that of a kind which betokened more than ordinary friendliness; and yet no one mentioned it; no one wrote to me. Mrs. Kemp, I knew, would be on the watch after receiving my letter, and she would surely have written to me if she had seen or heard anything she disapproved. Could Jessie's acquaintance be carried on secretly? — and, if so, what could be the motive?

As I thought, I almost made up my mind at once to write out all my fears and suspicions to Roger. I hoped he would understand, and trusted he would be merciful. But again I hesitated. The ground upon which a husband and wife stand, is known only to themselves. All other persons are placed in certain relations to each other, which may be calculated according to some general principles of human nature; but marriage forms, as it were, a new combination, which no one but the individuals themselves can be acquainted with. The fact of the tie being one of choice, like that of friendship, and yet indissoluble, like that of birth, puts it beyond the reach of ordinary laws. Each case must be dealt with separately; and what chord in Roger's breast I might touch, by insinuating the slightest doubt of his wife's perfect openness in all her dealings with him, I could not venture to predict. Generous, *loving*, and forgiving, as he would be to me his sister, there

might be a depth of wounded feeling with regard to his wife, which might even render him unjust. No, Jessie herself could be the only person safely to suggest Jessie's faults.

It must be left for the present, for a few weeks, — it could not, should not be more. Once in Paris, with John Hervey to support me, Miss Milicent must be forced to open her eyes to the wrong course she was pursuing. She must be compelled to return to England with Mrs. Weir; whose morbid mind would, I hoped, be satisfied, at least for a while, now that she had once seen her husband, and proved to him her willingness to join him. What was to come after that I could not at present think. Perhaps some plan might be arranged for a meeting at certain times, — once a year, or not so often, — anything that would satisfy Mrs. Weir; and yet enable her friends to watch over her, so that she and Miss Milicent might not be ruined by their own weakness, and Mr. Weir's wild and selfish speculations. I need not trouble myself with thinking of all that distant future, — only, go home I must, the very first moment I could be spared. Till then, — Prayer and Faith. What would the world be without them? I turned back to the inn, and went upstairs, inquired if Mrs. Weir was ready to return, and found Mr. Weir engaged in giving her an account of his illness, and Miss Milicent placing cushions at the back of her chair. She looked placid, but very weary; yet I was satisfied. When I remembered her condition in that dark bed-room in London, I felt we had done wisely.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

Time moves slowly when one is describing; but not so slowly as when one is waiting and expecting. We were detained at Andely more than a week. Our luggage was returned to us the day after we lost it, and we then regularly established ourselves at the inn. Mr. Weir regained his strength with tolerable rapidity; but his illness had been severe. Every day Mrs. Weir drove over to see him, sat with

him for about a quarter of an hour, asked the same questions, and heard the same answers, and returned to lie down on her bed, and be nursed for the remainder of the day.

With the discomforts of the little inn, the smallness of the rooms, the increasing cold of the weather, and the absence of the niceties to which Mrs. Weir had been accustomed, it would have been very hard to bear but for the prospect of removal. In Paris, Miss Milicent assured her mother they should be quite comfortable. She evidently believed that Mrs. Weir was going to stay there for a permanence, and that I intended to remain and take care of her. I did not endeavour to undeceive her. I lived in the hope that all would be made easy by the arrival of John Hervey.

M. Dalange went the day after my conversation with him — that was no slight relief to me — but Miss Milicent informed me that we should probably meet him again at Paris, and that perhaps Mr. Macdonald would join us. A pleasant prospect! But they could scarcely be more disagreeable to me than Mr. Weir, whose satirical politeness made me feel every day more and more how entirely I had made him my enemy. But I cared for none of them. I did not think of any of them. My one object and interest was Mrs. Weir; and the attentions which she claimed were very engrossing. I was by no means satisfied about her. Not that I regretted for a moment having brought her abroad; it was the one hope which remained; it had been tried under medical sanction, and, no doubt, to a certain extent, it had succeeded. Mrs. Weir's mind could scarcely be said to have been strengthened, but at least it was calmed. There was nothing, however, which indicated any permanent return to the state in which she had been even a year ago. We could not induce her to work, or occupy herself in any way; and she would listen to no reading except the Bible. It was beautiful, though in some respects mournful, to see how this one pillar of strength supported her weakened intellect. The contrast was so great. The very clearness of her faith, the fulness of her comprehension on the one subject of religion, made the shattered condition of her mind upon all

worldly matters only the more painful. It was like that rare gift of simple belief which we sometimes are permitted to see developing itself in a little child, shut out by illness from all instruction, or even from communication with the world about it, and so living, by the grace of God's Spirit working on the vividness of its infant imagination, in the realities of the world unseen. They who have never watched such a phenomenon are not likely to believe in its existence. They who have, treasured it silently in their hearts as a token sent from the "better land," not to be exhibited, but to be kept in store against the hour of temptation. Even now, in these weary days of delay, deprived of her usual comforts, with perpetual little annoyances as regarded food, and warmth, and careful attendance, there was one sentence always ready from Mrs. Weir's lips, "God sends it, Ursula;" and when she had said this, there was no more thought of complaint. She would lie on her bed waiting, till my patience was quite exhausted, whilst something was being prepared for her which had been ordered, and misunderstood, or forgotten. Several times I wished her to let me try my own English cookery, but the habit of submission and endurance which she had learnt during her hard discipline under Mrs. Temple was now so fixed, that I could not persuade her to allow it. "What was sent," she said, "that she would take;" and once or twice, when unknown to herself I had contrived some little delicacy which I thought she would fancy, she discovered it with singular quickness, and observed, gently, but reproachfully, "Ah! Ursula, you would make me troublesome as I used to be; that is not right;" and I could scarcely persuade her to touch it, except by looking vexed and disappointed. The feeling was not reasonable, not like common sense, yet it seemed to me to belong to some sense which was higher and better — only, perhaps, it required to be transplanted to another world.

I had no news from home except a few lines from Roger, who was never in the habit of writing long letters. He told me everything was going on well, and that Jessie had been

into Hove, but nothing else except about household and farming concerns. From John Hervey I had a short note, saying that he hoped to be in Paris in the course of the next week or ten days, but that he could not fix the exact time.

When Miss Milicent found that he had really agreed to her proposal, I think she became a little frightened as to the step she had taken, but I did my best to reassure her, for every day made me see more and more that if she was allowed to follow her own guidance, or place herself in Mr. Weir's hands, great mischief would follow. After receiving John's letter, I urged our departure for Paris as soon as possible. The change I hoped might be serviceable to Mrs. Weir, and it was a very dreary uncomfortable life we were living at the little inn.

Movement was delightful to Miss Milicent. She was in high spirits on the morning we were to leave Andely, and took all the arrangements of the journey on herself. We went back to Gaillon in the shaky carriage which had lately been hired for Mrs. Weir, and sent Louise with the luggage by the little omnibus; and very different the road seemed to me, when viewed by the light of a bright sun, from what it was on the evening of the dreary journey, which brought us to Andely. I felt exceedingly thankful, that so far my plans might be said to have prospered, for whatever might be the event as regarded the object for which I had left England, at least I hoped to be instrumental in saving Miss Milicent from further folly.

We were to take possession of the same rooms at Paris, which Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent had before occupied. Miss Milicent assured me they would be very comfortable for her mother, and I was obliged to trust to her. I believe the woman of the house promised as many bedrooms as could be wanted; but, not understanding French, I could only leave these things to others, and content myself with paying,—and very fast the money went. When I was told that a French *franc*, so like our English shilling, was tenpence, I fancied *everything* in France must be cheap, and certainly they made

us pay wonderfully little at Andely; but I soon changed my mind when we arrived at Paris.

The journey was short and easy, and Mrs. Weir bore it very well; and though she did not take much notice of anything herself, she sat quiet and allowed me to look about as I wished. I was in the first-class carriage with her, for Miss Milicent would not undertake the charge of her father and mother both, and indeed, I think it would have been more than she could manage, though it troubled me a little to find how Mrs. Weir depended upon me, and I thought how I should ever manage to leave her.

We entered Paris about half-past two, or nearly three o'clock. Miss Milicent was highly excited. "Now, Ursie, look, — do you see? here is the station. We shall stop directly. You keep with my mother. Father, don't you trouble yourself, I will see to the luggage, and will come after you with it." And the moment the train stopped, Miss Milicent jumped out, called a cab, or what in London we should say was a cab, made her father and mother, Louise and myself, get into it, gave the direction to the driver, and sent us off. What we were to do without her I could not tell; but she would not hear my expostulation, and away we drove through the streets of tall houses, gay with shops, and crowded with people, — and my head was distracted with the noise, and my thoughts reverted uncomfortably to the luggage, left in the charge of Miss Milicent. I don't think I half enjoyed that first sight of Paris, except in recollection. We stopped in rather a narrow street, and entered a court yard. A woman appeared from a little room like the bar-room at an hotel, which opened into it, and there was some talk with Louise, and on we went into an inner court, in which one or two people were standing, idling about. Louise knocked at a green door, and made some more inquiries; but Mr. Weir, seeming quite at home, entered, telling us to follow. Such a dirty, uncarpeted, winding staircase as we had to mount! It was as though all the little boys in Paris had been amusing themselves that morning, by running up and down with muddy shoes on. I

hoped Mrs. Weir did not notice it, but the way in which she put her foot upon the first step made me fear she did. At the top, however, it was better, the lobby was wide, and when we opened another door, we were in a dark but clean passage.

"This will be your room, my dear," said Mr. Weir, as he threw open the door of a little sitting-room, with rather a grand air. I had expected something very pretty; but my dismay was great, when I saw a cheerless looking apartment, with a polished floor, a small table in one corner, looking as though it had come there by accident, a chiffonnier, a few chairs, and a window looking out upon the leads of the neighbouring house. "And this will be your bed-room," continued Mr. Weir, with the same grand air which reminded me of the time when he had been accustomed to show off the beauties of Dene. There was more hope in the bed-room; a French bed always looks comfortable, and there were besides one or two ornamental vases, and a little clock, and some artificial flowers, and a sofa; and the window fronted the court-yard, in which were a few plants. Mrs. Weir might make herself at home there. But that dreary salon! It quite weighed upon my mind. It need not have done so, however; I don't think Mrs. Weir was able then to remark anything, she was too tired, and I only had to put her upon the sofa, and make her rest herself, till the luggage came. Mr. Weir soon left her, which was a blessing; his presence always oppressed her. I hoped she would fall asleep, but she was restless, and I was a little afraid she might be feverish. At last, however, she did close her eyes, and I was just thinking how glad I was, when a great noise was heard outside the room, the door was burst open, and in came two men with boxes, followed by Miss Milicent. "There, Ursie; now, haven't I managed well? Mother, how are you? Louise, where is Louise?" and away hurried Miss Milicent, leaving the two Frenchmen behind her. They stayed, evidently not for a moment thinking they were in the way, talking and moving the boxes about, and going out into the passage and bringing in more packages, till Miss

Milicent and Louise returned, and increased chattering went on, and another man, I believe the master of the house, was called up, to settle some question about payment. It nearly drove me frantic, till I heard Mrs. Weir's gentle voice say — "Ursula, if they would be kind enough not to speak quite so loudly I should be glad. My head is aching." I could not be frantic then, even for her.

CHAPTER LXIX.

Before I had been many days in Paris, I was inexpressibly thankful for the back rooms and the court-yard. The noise in the streets was distracting; a loud clatter, far worse than the continual rumble in London. If I had been alone, and wishing only to amuse myself, of course it would have been different. I should have willingly borne the noise for the sake of seeing everything; but amusement was by no means in my thoughts. I went out once or twice with Miss Milicent, at her mother's request; but I could less bear to leave Mrs. Weir. She was becoming very weak. The weight which had oppressed her mind seemed now to be doing its work upon her body. In London I should have said that she might have lived for years, — a saddened, dreary life. In Paris, as I watched her day by day, it seemed as though the breath of her existence was but the flickering of a light flame, soon about to be extinguished for ever. I doubt if any one saw it but myself. Mr. Weir, in his extreme selfishness, no sooner found himself settled in tolerable comfort, and living at the expense of another, than he seemed to set aside anything like care or thought, and to turn his attention only to the easiest means of whiling away the time which hung heavy upon his hands. He was expecting M. Dalange, and, as I soon understood, Mr. Macdonald. When they arrived, no doubt he fully anticipated gaining his point with his wife, and plunging again into speculations. In the mean time he rose very late, and went out as much as he could, taking Miss Milicent with him; she her-

self, as I perceived, being only too willing to go. It surprised me less, as I saw more of Paris, that Miss Milicent should have had such a twisted sense of her duty whilst living there. It is a city to make one forgetful. There is in it such a tone of living for this world's pleasures. To think of self-denial and self-discipline when walking through the Boulevards, or driving up the Champs Elysées, seems as much out of place as a sermon in a ball-room. No doubt there are very good and earnest people to be found there: it would be extremely uncharitable to say the contrary. But as in London the chief thought seems to be how best to transact worldly business, so in Paris the one ever-present object appears to be how to find worldly amusement.

I dared not sound Mrs. Weir as to her wishes for any future plans. I could only divert her mind, and occupy it as best I might for the present, hoping that when John Hervey arrived, I should see my way more clearly. I had written home again, and hoped, now that we were in Paris, I might hear frequently and more regularly, if I set a good example. One disadvantage, however, I found was likely to arise from being moderately within reach of England. I was not as before free from Mrs. Temple's interference. She wrote to me almost immediately on my arrival in Paris, complaining that I did not consult her, or tell her anything, and calling herself very ill-used. In return I reminded her that I had given her all general information, and for medical particulars begged to refer her to Dr. Green, to whom I had written fully. Mrs. Temple was one of those persons who can only be controlled by men. There was a hint, almost a threat, at the end of one of her letters, that if I was not more communicative, she should think it her duty to follow us to Paris to see how matters were going on; but I would not dwell upon the idea, hoping it was only a mode of venting her irritation.

A thankful day it was for me when I heard that John Hervey might be expected in Paris the next evening. The news came in a business-like note to Miss Milicent, and a very great excitement it put her into. She came to me as I was sitting in

Mrs. Weir's room after breakfast, and beckoned me to the door. "Here, Ursie! here," she said in a loud whisper, which I knew Mrs. Weir particularly disliked, "What is to be done? He is coming. I am not prepared to see him; you must settle it."

I left the room, closing the door behind me. "John Hervey, do you mean, Miss Milicent?" I said.

"Yes; come here, Ursie," and she drew me into a tiny bed-room, originally meant for a dressing-room, the chief furniture of which, besides the bed, consisted of a large black trunk. "You see, I have said nothing to my father; and what is to be done with Mr. Hervey when he arrives?"

"He will go to an hotel, no doubt," I said. "He does not expect to be received here."

"What folly you talk, Ursie Grant! He could sleep in the passage, if sleeping were all. But who is to begin business with him?"

"You, Miss Milicent," I said. "Mr. Weir is never out of his room till twelve o'clock. You will have a couple of hours in the morning quite undisturbed."

She did not wish the difficulty to be surmounted so easily. "I mightn't be ready for him at that time; and I don't see how I am to explain matters. He had better wait and talk to M. Dalange and Mr. Macdonald."

"That may be necessary. But he must hear some statement from you first, Miss Milicent."

"Must! must! It is all a mistake, Ursie. You had better never have advised me to send for him."

She was the most provoking of women; but if driven up into a corner, I knew she would manage for herself, and I was quite resolved not to manage for her; so I merely said that I thought if I were in her place I should make a memorandum of anything I might wish to say or explain to Mr. Hervey; and with this suggestion I left her; and soon afterwards she went out with her father. In the evening, however, before I went to bed, she called me again into her room, and holding up a sheet of scrawled paper, exclaimed — "There! it's done; all

ready; everything put down. He will understand from this better than any lawyer would explain. And he is a sensible man. He is not like you, Ursie."

I never so fully comprehended before the lesson to be learnt from the practice of birds, when they bring their young ones to the edge of the nest, and, giving them a push, force them to discover the use of their own wings. Miss Milicent was the strangest mixture of wilfulness and dependence I ever met with; but I suspect that all strong points of character have an opposite weakness existing with them.

John Hervey's visit was ostensibly to me. That was a great comfort to me, for it would give me the opportunity of seeing him alone, and hearing all he had to tell me of Sandcombe. When I was not occupied with Mrs. Weir, I was beginning to long for home, not merely from anxiety about Jessie, but from a real wish to be there again.

Two days afterwards he arrived late in the evening. Mrs. Weir, being more tired than usual, had gone to bed very early; and I was working in her room, watching till she was asleep. I had my meals in a little room, used by the people of the house for chance purposes, a kind of waiting-room; and I was just expecting to be called down to supper, when Louise came to tell me that a stranger wished to speak to me. I motioned to her to take my place, and ran downstairs. It was a new joy to me to meet a friend in that foreign land, and I rushed into the room, exclaiming, — "Oh, Mr. Hervey, this is pleasant!" and holding out both my hands, gave his such a hearty shake for welcome, as I am sure they never received from me before. He was much quieter than I was; but I could not think him unkind, for he asked so anxiously how I was, and whether I was much worried, and was evidently so interested about me. Yet I did not inquire in return what kind of journey he had had, which was very selfish in me, but I began upon Sandcombe news directly, making him laugh as he answered me, by every now and then bursting into the middle of a sentence with the exclamation, — "I am so glad to see you. I don't think I was ever so glad to see a friend before."

"And so you have not brought me anything from Roger," I said at last, after there was a moment's pause. "I think he might have written."

"He has not so much time as he used to have," was the reply. "He is turning quite into a gay man, Ursie."

"Not with his own consent," I said.

"Well! I don't know, if a man and his wife, as they say, are one. And what is a poor fellow in Roger's case to do?" John Hervey did not speak lightly, though the words might have sounded so.

"Roger is strong enough to be master," I said; "and he ought to be."

"It is not so easy as you think, Ursie, to be that; especially when a man has once set out on a wrong tack; you won't mind my saying that."

"Not at all," I replied, and in fact I felt relieved, and added: "it has been in my thoughts, Mr. Hervey, longer than you may think, though I have not said anything."

"I was sure of it; Mrs. Kemp, and Mary, and I, were talking only the other evening, and saying that if you were at home we were sure you would be vexed."

"But why does not Mrs. Kemp write to me?" I exclaimed, "I begged her to do so."

"I can't exactly say why, seeing I don't know what you told her to write about. But what she would most likely have to tell, Ursie, would be things better explained by word of mouth than by letter. They might be made too much of if they were written down."

"I dread trifles," I said.

"So do I," was his reply, "especially between a man and his wife in the first year of their married life. They are both exploring in unknown lands, and it's an anxious thing to look on and see which way the discoveries are tending, whether to happiness or the contrary."

"Roger's discoveries seemed all satisfactory when I left home," I said.

"*Perhaps they* were, I don't say they are not so now. But,

Ursie, I do think that Roger must be surprised to find what a taste his wife has for gaieties, and it's a good thing he does not hear the remarks I hear about it."

"People are extremely ill-natured," I said. "When a woman is married she is expected to alter her tastes and become domestic and stay at home all at once. Now any one may know that such sudden changes are not in human nature."

"And men might do well to consider that before they marry," said John, thoughtfully. "No offence to our friend, Roger, Ursie, than whom a better man does not live. But, I own, it does fret me to hear observations made about his wife which, if they were made about my sister, if I had one, I should shut her up."

I started. "Remarks made upon Jessie!" I exclaimed. "Is she really so imprudent? Oh! Mr. Hervey, this is far worse than I had imagined."

"Now, don't be so hasty," he answered, laughing a little. "I did not say anything, or, at least, mean anything, which you need take such fright at. I am so particular myself, that to hear a sister of mine called flighty would be enough to make me turn the key upon her, and say, 'Stay at home, because you are not fit to go out;' but that is not the way of the world, you know, Ursie; and young women in the present day have very free-and-easy fashions, and yet after a time come all right."

"I hate their fashions," I exclaimed; "for a woman to bring herself into such notice by dress, or manner, or action, let the thing be ever so innocent in itself, is detestable."

"I quite agree with you," he said; "and all that I meant about Jessie was, that she does manage to do things which draw such notice. Her dress is one point, and I heard Mrs. Kemp say she did think she should mention that to you. It is my belief that somehow or other your sister-in-law takes the *patterns* after Mrs. Price; any way I know that when I saw her in church last Sunday I did not know her, she had such a

showy look, and Roger was quite grave when some one joked him about it."

"She is too silly," I replied; "she has always been a perfect baby about dress, taking to every new fashion as it came out, and never once considering how unfitting it might be."

"There is one thing graver than all, though," said John, "as we have stumbled upon the subject. I didn't mean to worry you about it, only—"

"Tell me everything," I exclaimed; "let me know the worst."

"How impatient you are! Not at all changed for being in France," said John, laughing. "You may probably know as much as I do, for it concerns the past more than the present."

"The past!" I said; "what past? What do you mean? I know nothing."

"Indeed!" he replied. "Not that Jessie was writing letters to Mr. Macdonald, and encouraging him, up to the very day she accepted Roger?"

"To the best of my knowledge," I replied, "she refused Mr. Macdonald flatly, and afterwards never had anything to do with him except going over to Dene occasionally with Miss Milicent."

"The world does not say so," answered John, gravely.

"Then the world tells falsehoods, as it always does," I replied.

"I wouldn't have you be so sure of that," he answered. "It is said that Mr. Macdonald has letters of hers in his possession, and that he shows them about as a proof of her having jilted him."

I did not start then, or even speak; I sat quite still, for I felt stunned.

"Have I troubled you so very much?" said John, looking much distressed. "I thought, to be sure, you knew everything, and Roger too. Many girls will flirt with one man, and then turn round and marry another; though I can say nothing to excuse them. But, of course, in such a case people will talk."

"Talk!" I exclaimed, and the sound of my voice was, even to my own ears, sharpened by anger and misery. "Talk of Roger's wife! Oh, Mr. Hervey! is it to be borne?"

"Ursie, you must be reasonable," he said, and his tone, though kind, was severe. "I will tell you nothing if you will not use common sense to control yourself. I had not the least idea of raising such a storm."

"You don't know," I replied, "you can little imagine what may come from all this. Jessie a jilt! Think what Roger would say!"

"I don't like to think," he said. "But no one can undo the past. What I really want to explain to you is the state of things at present."

"I don't want explanation," I replied, proudly. "I scorn the opinion of the world. Let Jessie have been what she may, she is as true in heart to her husband now as the most model wife that ever breathed."

"So say I," replied John, "so says Mrs. Kemp, so say all who really know her. But the world will not judge her so kindly, Ursie, when it sees her seeking the company of such persons as Mrs. Price and her friends, — walking with them in Hove, joining them after church, — and this besides going out visiting far more than people are used to in our neighbourhood, and dressing in a way which even quiet Mrs. Richardson has been heard to lament as setting a bad example. A woman's character before marriage follows her afterwards, Ursie, as you yourself will be inclined to allow; and people who declare that Jessie was a flirt and a jilt — it grieves me to use the words, though I only tell you what I hear — before she became Roger's wife, still look askance at her; especially when Mr. Macdonald goes about talking of all that went on with him, and Mrs. Price is heard to lament that her poor little friend has made a mistake."

"They are mean, miserable, revengeful," I exclaimed. "There is no truth nor honour in them."

"I don't think there is," he replied. "I am quite sure, *indeed*, from things I have heard, that Mr. Macdonald speaks

ill of her from spite and wounded vanity. He does not choose to let it be believed that another was really preferred to him."

"And Mrs. Price is spiteful also," I said. "She had reckoned upon Jessie as one of her own set, and she is provoked with her for having married out of it; and now she is resolved to have her back again, whether it is Roger's will or not. I don't care for them, Mr. Hervey. I don't care for the world, or its opinions, or its talk, except with the anger of a moment. What I do care for is —"

"Roger," said John, and his voice trembled, I thought, with kindly sympathy. I would not look towards him; I could not bear him to see my tears. "You have been more Roger's wife in devotion to him than Jessie has been," he added, "though her love may be great now."

I paused to reply. An indescribable yearning for affection — a sense of wasted feelings — oppressed me. It was something with which I could not trust myself, and I turned from the subject abruptly, and said, "We must talk now of Mrs. Weir; we have said enough of Sandcombe."

All John Hervey's thoughtful tenderness of manner vanished, I could not tell why. He became the straightforward, prudent man of business; and in a few moments we were as deep in the intricacies and difficulties of Mrs. Weir's affairs as though Roger and Jessie, Sandcombe and Dene, had existed only in fiction.

CHAPTER LXX.

Miss Milicent would not see John Hervey that evening, and I was half afraid that she might take it into her head again to make some excuse the next morning; but she came to me soon after eight o'clock, prepared, as she said, to go into all particulars. I think her resolution had been strengthened by hearing that M. Dalange might be in Paris almost immediately. She wished me to be present at the interview; but I declined. My position in the family was

already sufficiently awkward. I had more authority than could properly have belonged to me under ordinary circumstances, and it was a perpetual effort to me to keep my place so as not to create ill-will. I was more especially particular as regarded money matters. What I had done already was entirely on the plea of Mrs. Weir's health, for which I felt myself responsible. I had no business to interfere in any other way, and I had already made John Hervey aware of the danger I dreaded from Miss Milicent's imprudence, so that he would be quite sufficiently on his guard.

The interview was a very long one. I began to be fidgety as it drew near to twelve o'clock, lest Mr. Weir should come out of his room, and be roused by the sight of a stranger; but, just as the clock struck, the door of the salon opened, and John Hervey ran downstairs, whilst Miss Milicent went to her room. That augured no satisfaction on her part; if she had been pleased, she would have come at once to tell me.

Mr. Weir had his breakfast and read his letters. I happened to go into the room at the time, and remarked that he looked troubled. He spoke to me hastily, and desired me to tell Miss Milicent to be ready for him in ten minutes. This was an excuse for going to her, which I was glad to have. She heard my message without making any reply; but as I was going away, she called me back again.

"You are dying to know, Ursie. I wish you would speak out and say what you want. Your John Hervey and I have had a quarrel."

I replied that I had fancied as much.

"Yes; we have had a quarrel, and we may have many more before we have done. He talks law to me, and I can't endure law."

"Only, unfortunately, Miss Milicent, we are all forced to do so," I said.

"I don't choose to be forced. I never have attended to it yet, and I don't see why I am to begin now. It may be law, but it isn't justice, Ursie Grant, that a woman should not have the control of her own money."

"And how can Mr. Hervey interfere?" I asked.

"He says there are trustees. I don't care for trustees. When my old aunt left me my money, she meant me to do what I liked with it, for she was very fond of me. She always gave me five shillings at Christmas, and half-a-crown at Easter, and she never dreamed of my being worried in this way."

"But if Mr. Hervey tells you the truth, Miss Milicent," I replied, "you will scarcely be angry with him."

"I don't see that. When the doctor gives you a dose of medicine, you are not obliged to him, and, ten to one, but you would throw it away if you could."

"Not quite," I answered. "I take it, though I dislike it."

"Well! and so have I taken what John Hervey says. I listened to him like a lamb; but I told him I didn't believe a word he said; and I mean to talk to my father about it."

This would indeed produce a storm. I trembled for the consequences of my advice when I thought how it might affect Mrs. Weir. "Is Mr. Hervey coming here again, Miss Milicent?" I asked.

"I don't know. He will be of little use if he does come. What am I to say to M. Dalange?"

"That you can have nothing to do with his schemes, I imagine."

"Very well for you to say, Ursie," was her answer; "but if you have to save a father from ruin —" her voice trembled, and she stopped.

It was very true. In my interest for Mrs. Weir I forgot the claims of the other parent, and I longed to see John again, that I might hear from himself what advice he had given. From Miss Milicent I could expect nothing but vagueness. She went out with her father and left me alone with Mrs. Weir. It was a very cold day, and the wood fire, though bright and cheerful, did not thoroughly heat the apartment like one of English coal. Mrs. Weir sat hovering over it. I could not make her warm, though I wrapped her in shawls, and rubbed

her feet and hands. She only allowed me to do this for a little while, and said she was afraid I should tire myself. "And it is not well to be waited upon so much, Ursula," she added; "so you had better go out and leave me."

"I have not read to you to-day, dear Ma'am," I replied. "Perhaps if you would let me do that you would be better."

"No; not now, thank you. I am cold, Ursula. People in Paris are always cold. They said so when I was young. It was a long time ago. I came to Paris then, and I had a little sister, and she came too, and somebody else came. But I wish to do my duty to my husband, and so I am with him. If he wishes to go back, I shall go back too."

There was a connection of ideas in the speech, incoherent though it was. I, who knew her history, could trace it, and I thought I would try the experiment of taking her back to those old times. "Were you a large party, Ma'am," I said, "when you first came to Paris?"

"There were five of us, Ursula; my father, and my mother, and my sister, and — my husband doesn't like his name mentioned, so you won't ask me about him. But Paradise is a happy place. He must be quite at home there now, for he has been there a long time."

"It won't be very long before we shall all be at home there, I hope, dear Ma'am," I said.

"Not long; — no; and Mr. Richardson said, one day, I need not be afraid, and I don't think I am. But, Ursula, I should like to be thankful as I ought; for you know Heaven is a gift."

"It is not easy to be thankful aright, I am afraid, Ma'am," I said; "many care so much more for earth than they do for Heaven."

"Is it so?" and Mrs. Weir looked up at me with an air of momentary wonder. "They cannot know what it is. Ursula, do you ever think how pleasant the angels' language will be?"

Think! alas! that future existence in which Mrs. Weir already lived, was to me — busy, and anxious, and interested in the things of this life — still far, far off. I laid my hand

upon hers, and said: "Dear Ma'am, I have never learnt to think as I ought, though you have often tried to teach me, but if you will tell me now about the angels' language, I am sure I shall be glad to listen."

"Oh no," she replied sadly, but very gently. "It cannot be told, it can only be thought about. My mind wanders when with you, Ursula. It never wanders with my Saviour, only sometimes it grows so mournful because He suffered, and had no help, and no one thanked Him. And then I do not quite know about my life now, I cannot think, and I forget; yet I still talk to Him; and if my head is confused He understands. But I should like the angels' language. They must always tell quite what they mean, and I cannot."

Mrs. Weir passed her hand over her eyes, and a painful look of bewilderment rested on her features. Yes, she was confused, troubled, — life was a misty perplexity to her; yet through it all, the Love which is the one great, enduring reality, was growing, and strengthening, and gathering into itself every other feeling, — even that which had been the blissful dream of her youth. She was urgent with me that I should go out; and, finding that I really could be of no material use to her for the next hour or two, I consented, as I had really seen very little of Paris, and the woman of the house had promised to take me to the Hôtel de Ville, and several other places which she said were worth seeing. A greater contrast could not have existed than between the quietness and sacredness of Mrs. Weir's room, with the society of one whose thoughts were dwelling with the angels, and the gay crowd which thronged the streets of Paris. I was amazed; I could not help being so, and for the time I was engrossed by the scene. Now I doubt if I could be, under similar circumstances; but those were comparatively young days, and life, with all its trials, and even some at the moment very pressing, was full of novelty and excitement in that foreign land.

CHAPTER LXXI.

We went to the Hôtel de Ville, and the Church of Notre Dame, and afterwards to the Palais de Justice and the Sainte Chapelle. My eyes were dazzled with bright colours, and I was almost tired of saying "How beautiful!" for I had never seen anything in England that could be in the least compared to the grandeur and richness of the buildings in Paris. But my mind was a little distracted by the thought of John Hervey. I did so very much wish to see him, and hear from his own lips what had passed in his interview with Miss Milicent. I looked for him at every turn, fancying I should know his English face and figure at any distance; but it was a useless search, and I had given up the wish as foolish, when just as we were ascending the steps leading to the Palais de Justice, a party came up whom I recognised as Mr. Weir, Miss Milicent, and, I thought, M. Dalange. I don't know that I was exactly surprised to see them. M. Dalange had been expected every day, but I very much disliked meeting him, and I hurried forward with my companion, hoping the others would go into the Sainte Chapelle, and that I might in that way lose sight of them. But the Sainte Chapelle did not appear to be their object. Miss Milicent and her father remained in the open space in front of the Palais de Justice. M. Dalange came up the steps, hurried by me without noticing me, and went — where I could not tell. It was along a passage, and through a door, but he was evidently at home in the place, and his visit had nothing to do with sight-seeing. The Palais de Justice did not interest me very much, and it seemed as if we were intruding amongst the lawyers, but I still lingered, being unwilling to encounter Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent. In about five minutes, M. Dalange appeared again. I saw him go down the steps, and watched him talking eagerly to Mr. Weir, and then they seemed to turn upon Miss Milicent, who looked very eager and excited. After a while they left the place, and I thought I saw Miss Milicent and Mr. Weir

get into a cab, but I was not quite sure. I had not yet been into the Sainte Chapelle, and I was told that it was more worth seeing than anything in Paris, so very richly ornamented with beautiful colours and gilding; but — I don't know why it was — the sight of the persons whom I had just been watching, had rather destroyed my pleasure, and I felt as though I did not care for the Sainte Chapelle. My thoughts dwelt more upon Miss Milicent, left to be worked upon by those men. She seemed to me entangled in a net, and I half regretted not having gone up to her, that at least she might have had the opportunity of speaking, if there was anything amiss. I stood looking at the spot from which I fancied the carriage had driven off, and without turning my head made an observation as I thought to my companion, when to my surprise and satisfaction it was answered by the friendly voice of John Hervey. "Ursie, here alone!"

"No, not alone," I answered, pointing to my friend; "but where did you come from? I have been looking for you all the morning. This seems quite a meeting place. Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent and M. Dalange have just been here."

"Who? Not that rogue, Dalange?"

"Yes," I said; "I am sure I was not mistaken." John moved, as though he would have rushed away from me, but he stopped short.

"How long have they been gone? which way did they go?"

"They are but just gone, not two minutes. Mr. Weir, I think, was in a cab with Miss Milicent. Look, in that direction, to the right. What are you so anxious about?"

"I did not expect M. Dalange so soon," he said; "and Miss Milicent is so ignorant, she knows nothing whatever of money matters. They will get every penny from her, and it is all a fraud, a monstrous fraud."

"But she can't do anything without the consent of the trustees," I said. "You told her that yourself."

"But these men may make her take responsibilites upon herself which the trustees can't refuse to acknowledge. I

talked to her, Ursie, this morning, till I was hoarse. She was mad with me; but I would make her hear me, and I hoped I had stopped the thing for the time. I have been writing this very day to one of the trustees, who is a lawyer, begging him to interfere."

"That will only make matters worse," I said; "the very name of a lawyer makes her angry."

"Then she must go her own way," he said. "If it is to ruin, it must be so."

"No," I exclaimed, "it must not be. Mr. Hervey, you must stop her," and I caught his arm as he was turning away from me.

He stood in silent thought.

"For her mother's sake, — for mine. Oh! Mr. Hervey, it is very near my heart."

"Everything is near your heart, Ursie," he exclaimed, "except — but you wish it — I will try, though I have no hope," and so he left me.

I entered the Sainte Chapelle. It was wonderfully beautiful, but I had not the heart to enjoy it. I felt thoroughly disappointed. John Hervey's coming was of no use, and the counsel which I had thought so wise, so sure to bring everything right, had failed. I became entirely desponding, and went back to the lodgings, prepared to find that all I most feared with respect to Mrs. Weir had occurred, that Mr. Weir had taken advantage of my absence to press upon her those unfortunate business matters, and that, in consequence, the work of weeks had been wholly undone. But Mrs. Weir was lying quietly on the sofa, and Louise sitting by her at work. Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent, I was told, had not returned, but the dinner was nearly ready, and it was supposed they would be in almost immediately. Soon afterwards, as I was in my room, I heard Miss Milicent come upstairs, but she went directly to her own apartment, and locked the door. That was about half-past five. We waited till six, seven, half-past seven, still Mr. Weir did not appear, and Miss Milicent's answer, when we knocked at her door to ask about

him, was that she knew nothing, she did not want any dinner, she had a headache; and still no one was admitted to her apartment. Mrs. Weir was aware of something unusual, for her husband usually paid her a visit of a few minutes every day before dinner. This day of course she missed him, but she was satisfied on being told that he must have had some engagement to detain him. I was thankful that she remained so quiet, but I began to be uneasy myself; and I could not prevail upon Miss Milicent to admit me to her room, or to give any answer to what was asked, except that she would not be disturbed. I persuaded Mrs. Weir to go to bed early. She inquired several times for her husband, but like a child was satisfied as soon as the slightest reason was given for his non-appearance. Miss Milicent opened her door to take in a cup of coffee and a roll, but this was all. I was sure that something painful had occurred, but all my trust lay in John Hervey. Whatever it might be, he would surely come to tell me of it, and I listened to every footstep on the stairs, and every noise of an opening door, thinking there would be some tidings of him. Louise went to bed. I sat up. Latterly, I had slept on a little sofa in Mrs. Weir's room. She was often restless at night, and I was afraid to leave her alone. It must have been half-past ten o'clock, and I was thinking whether I ought not to summon courage once more to apply to Miss Milicent to throw some light upon the mystery, when I did really hear sounds of an arrival, talking at the foot of the stairs, questions and answers, and one voice, — I thought I could not be deceived, yet I listened several times before I could feel sure — it was certainly Mrs. Temple's.

The sinking of my heart, the trembling nervousness which came over me, caused me to catch hold of the nearest chair, as though seized with faintness. Before I could recover myself, Miss Milicent was standing in the passage, like myself, listening. She saw me, and seizing me by the arm, dragged me into her room, and again locked the door.

"Ursie Grant, is it she? You have sent for her, you are in league *with her*," and she looked at me with fierce anger.

"I don't understand you, Miss Milicent," I said. "I believe it is Mrs. Temple; but why she is come, I know no more than yourself."

"But you wrote to her."

"No, indeed," I said.

"Then John Hervey did; some one must have told her."

"No one," I replied, "that I am aware of. And, Miss Milicent, you know she has been threatening to come for the last week."

"But just now, — to triumph over me, — to get me under her power! Ursie, I won't bear it."

It was all a mystery, and I had no time to inquire into it, for a servant came to say that Mrs. Temple was in the salon.

I drew back for Miss Milicent to pass before me; but she seated herself on the black trunk, folded her arms, and said quietly, "I shall not go."

"But, indeed, Miss Milicent," I observed, "if you will excuse me for saying so, you must. It is not my place to receive Mrs. Temple."

"I don't move. You may go and tell her what she wants to know, and send her away."

"I have nothing to tell," I replied. "Miss Milicent, you have kept us all sadly in suspense."

"Kept you in suspense," she exclaimed. "Ursie, you are pretending; it is your plan. You know as well as I do that we are all gone to ruin again; and that my father is off. John Hervey may have meant well, but he has acted cruelly."

"It is no plan of mine," I said, trying not to be angry at her accusation. "I know nothing, though I can guess something. John Hervey told me that the speculation of M. Dalange was a fraud, and I suppose he has interfered to stop it."

"Interfered by French law!" she exclaimed, "which is no better than English. The man may be in prison now for aught I know to the contrary; perhaps it may be the best place for him; but my father is off again, and now you may go and tell *Matilda* Temple that, and let her rejoice over it."

She stood up and pointed to the door with an air which was

almost dignified in its proud bitterness. I could not urge my point further. The key was turned as soon as I had left the apartment, and I had to face Mrs. Temple alone. As I passed Mrs. Weir's room, I looked in. She was sleeping, and oh! how earnestly I prayed that she might be gaining strength for the trials which were awaiting her.

"I was not expected, I perceive," was Mrs. Temple's stiff greeting, as I entered the salon. She had drawn her chair to the fire, and was endeavouring to stir up the dying embers.

"No, Ma'am," I replied, "you were not expected, and I am afraid you will find it cold. Can anything be got for you? Mr. Weir is not at home, and Miss Milicent has a bad headache."

"I see," she said sternly; "it is as I expected. Young woman, you are to understand that you are no longer mistress in this family. If Milicent Weir is as weakly blind as her mother, I warn you there are others on the watch for her interests, who will not let her be cajoled to ruin by the arts of a cunning girl." I was taken by surprise, yet I did not lose my calmness. Mrs. Temple's manner and words always had the effect of giving me a feeling of indifference and self-possession.

"I suppose, Ma'am," I said, "that you refer to myself. If you will have the goodness to explain your meaning, I will answer you as best I may."

"No doubt you have an answer ready," she exclaimed; "but I require actions, not words. I insist upon your instantly giving up the charge of Mrs. Weir to me, and making your arrangements for returning to England to-morrow. It is for that purpose I am come."

"I am afraid it will be impossible to oblige you, Ma'am," I replied; "I am responsible to Dr. Green, who placed me in my present position, and Mr. Weir and Miss Milicent also must have a voice in the matter. When they and Mrs. Weir wish me to go, I shall be quite ready, indeed glad, to do so, but I could not make any change by myself. And perhaps," I added, "you will be good enough to let me know the grounds upon which you wish me to do so."

"It is easy to pretend ignorance," she replied; "but there are proofs which you will find it anything but easy to answer. Do you know this handwriting?" and she produced a portion of a torn letter from her pocket-book, and pushed the candle towards me.

"It is my sister-in-law's handwriting," I said, feeling very much startled.

"Ah! you own that; perhaps this too will throw some light upon my business." She showed me another long letter signed "J. Macdonald," and pointed to the postscript. "I enclose a portion of a note from Mrs. Grant, which will confirm my assertions."

I felt the colour forsake my cheeks, and I sat down in the nearest chair, for I trembled all over; but it was not for any cause that Mrs. Temple would divine.

She kept her eyes fixed upon me. "You had better confess at once," she said. "You see that I have the power of discerning all your machinations. Your giddy sister-in-law is not likely to keep your secrets from her friends at Dene."

Angry and agitated though I was, I managed to reply, quietly: "Whatever my sister-in-law's note may have contained, Ma'am, it could be no confidential communication about me, for Jessie has nothing to tell."

"That may or may not be," said Mrs. Temple, in the same satirical tone. "Mrs. Grant at least writes to them openly, and tells them your plans, and your address, as you may see for yourself, and she again put the torn paper into my hand.

My eyes were dim; everything seemed to swim before me, and it was with difficulty I could make out the words: "Indeed you must believe that I tell you all I know. Ursula does not say when she shall return home. She is still at the same lodgings in Paris with Mrs. Weir, and I do not see how she can leave her. I think but for her they would all go to ruin again, but she manages everything her own way; even Mr. Weir does exactly what she wishes."

"*Mrs.* Weir is much obliged to you, doubtless," continued

Mrs. Temple, scarcely giving me time to finish, "for managing everything for her, but her friends would like to inquire a little more minutely into the particulars of this management. There have been some singular interferences of late. Mr. Hervey, I understand, is in Paris, summoned thither by Milicent Weir. A very singular adviser, certainly. Doubtless that was upon your recommendation."

I made no direct answer to this last remark. I cared nothing for Mrs. Temple's insinuations, nothing at that moment for anything or any person except Roger and Jessie. With the heavy, heavy aching at my heart, I was only anxious to come at once to the root of all this mystery, and so to rid myself of it. Confronting Mrs. Temple without shrinking, I answered, "I can make no reply or explanation as to anything you have said, Ma'am, unless you will do me the favour to tell me plainly and openly what it is which you accuse me of, and how you have gained your information. If you decline this, I am afraid I shall be obliged to leave you, as it is very late and I shall be afraid of disturbing Mrs. Weir by conversing any longer."

I suppose she saw from my manner that I was quite determined, and that nothing was to be obtained from me by indirect means, for in a more hasty and less sarcastic tone she answered: "Suspicions are quickly told when they are certainties. I accuse you of using undue influence in this house. I know that you assume the entire control not only of Mrs. Weir's income, but of her daughter's; I know that you have been planning to get Milicent Weir's money into the hands of this man, Hervey, who is a mere land-surveyor and speculator, — for what purpose I do not pretend to say; but he and you are too well known as acquaintances and friends of long standing not to make it certain that there is a complete understanding between you. I have reason to believe, moreover, that you are striving to work upon Mrs. Weir's mind in your own favour, and are taking advantage of her insanity, whilst you persist in the assertion that she is in the possession of sound reason. Some of these accusations I make from my

own observation and experience; others I have heard from persons residing in the neighbourhood of Stonecliff, and acquainted with the Mr. Macdonald in whom Milicent Weir has so strangely confided; and who, as well as Mr. Price of Dene, is, as every one knows, most intimate with your family, whether to your credit I do not pretend to say." And with the air of profound Christian charity Mrs. Temple heaved a deep sigh.

Such a maze of truth and falsehood. I was in complete bewilderment. How was I to extricate myself, and where was I to begin? Mrs. Temple waited patiently, though trying to awe me by severe looks; at last I said; "If you please, Ma'am, I will refer you to Miss Milicent to-morrow, to explain all things. Perhaps to-night you will be contented to know that Mr. Weir has again got himself into great difficulties, and that Mr. Hervey has helped him out of them. Mr. Weir is not expected home to-night, and if you would wish to have his room I will order it to be made ready for you at once, otherwise I am afraid the people of the house will be gone to bed."

I never in my life saw any one so angry as Mrs. Temple was then. I believe my quiet indifference exasperated her more than the fiercest storm of passion. I could not repeat all she said nor even all she did, as she paced up and down the room; in the midst I heard a shrill cry, like the voice of a terrified child, and, rushing to Mrs. Weir's room, found her in a state of frightful nervous excitement. Happily my first impulse was to lock the door behind me. When I went up to the bedside, the poor lady actually clung to me in alarm. "She is come back, Ursula, she is come to take me; I must go. They will shut me up. Oh! save me." And then she nearly threw herself out of bed in her fright, and when I forced her back, and made her rest her head on the pillow, she sank into a state of complete exhaustion for a few minutes, only to be roused again to fresh fears. She had heard Mrs. Temple's voice. She must hear it again. I felt there was nothing to be done but to acknowledge the truth and try to

reassure her by saying that I would remain with her, and that no one could take her from me. She made me repeat the words again and again; she caught at them as the drowning sailor catches at the plank which is to save him. But Mrs. Temple knocked at the door and inquired how her aunt was, and the nervous horror returned again. What was to be done with her I could not tell. When she was again calm for a few minutes I left her, locking the door on the outside and carrying away the key, and went to call Louise and make her wait upon Mrs. Temple, and then I returned to watch by the bedside. Mrs. Temple, I believe, went to bed, for she did not endeavour to gain admittance again; probably she felt it would be useless. It was a sad and most anxious night. If the case had been merely physical I should instantly have sent for medical advice, but what could a strange physician do in an illness so complicated and distressing? Mrs. Weir's pulse was fearfully quick. I trembled lest violent fever might be coming on, but I was afraid to call up Louise or Miss Milicent, to ask their opinion as to what should be done, lest Mrs. Temple should insist upon joining in the consultation. Of course I had no rest; I had not even an hour's quiet watching which might enable me to think over my difficulties, and seek for help in my great anxieties. I could but say a few short prayers from time to time for Mrs. Weir, Miss Milicent, myself, above all — oh! with what depth of earnestness was the petition offered! for my dear Roger and for Jessie.

CHAPTER LXXII.

There was no doubt as to Mrs. Weir's state in the morning. Fever had not only begun, but was increasing rapidly. A physician was sent for before Mrs. Temple was awake. Miss Milicent was thoroughly frightened and willing to do every thing she was told, though in her own peculiar way; and it was by her representations that I obtained from the physician, *what I most desired*, a strict command that no fresh person

should be admitted to Mrs. Weir's room. "I told him, Ursie," said Miss Milicent, when relating her interview, "that Matilda Temple was a Turk, and that the sight of her would throw my mother into convulsions, and that quite decided him." Mrs. Temple was extremely indignant, and threatened all kinds of interference in revenge, but she did not venture to do more, and I kept carefully out of her way, and made Miss Milicent take upon herself the part which fitly belonged to her. If this state of things could but last, I felt we might be able to weather the present storm. Miss Milicent, subdued by fright and anxiety, was more able now to give me a rational account of the proceedings of the previous day. In low tones, as she watched by Mrs. Weir, who lay tossing on her bed in restless unconsciousness, she informed me that after leaving the Palais de Justice, she, and Mr. Weir, and M. Dalange, had gone direct to the hotel where the latter had for the time taken up his abode. There M. Dalange proposed to put before her the state of her father's entanglements, which he declared demanded instant relief. She was not to be called upon to pay down any money at once, but she was only to be guarantee for certain sums which M. Dalange was to advance. She was frightened, and did not know how to refuse, and her father seemed quite desperate when he found she hesitated. They were in the midst of the discussion when they were interrupted by the entrance of John Hervey and a Frenchman, who appeared to have some legal authority. Miss Milicent said she could not understand all that went on, they talked so fast, and M. Dalange got into a violent passion; but he was taken off at last, evidently against his will, and John Hervey then brought her home.

"And what became of Mr. Weir?" I said.

"He went off. John Hervey tells me he is gone to Brussels."

"But was he allowed to go?" I said. "Was he not in as much danger as M. Dalange?"

"*My* father is no swindler, Ursie," replied Miss Milicent, *haughtily*; "he may speculate, but it is in good faith. John

Hervey says there is no such accusation against him as there is against these Frenchmen; but he is gone. The Frenchman did not know who he was, and had no directions about him, and almost as soon as the fuss began, my father slipped away, and that was the last I saw of him!"

It did not seem very like innocence, yet I felt thankful that Mr. Weir was at least saved from more public disgrace.

Miss Milicent was silent after this, she seemed very unwilling to allude to common subjects, and I did not wonder at it. If anything could convince her of the folly of trusting as she had done to her own judgment, I should suppose it would be the present condition of her family affairs; but she would say nothing, not one word of regret or acknowledgment, and when not actually attending upon her mother, sat brooding over the fire with her hands upon her knees, apparently lost in melancholy reflections. Mrs. Temple had a dreary, solitary day, but she showed no symptoms of being tired or of intending to leave us. She remained alone in the salon, working, and reading, and keeping watch, and when the doctor came in the middle of the day, had a long private conference with him. She spoke not one word to me, indeed I scarcely gave her the opportunity of doing so, and her communications with Miss Milicent were very brief. As to myself, I went on from hour to hour doing what was needed, and longing for two things,—one that I might see John Hervey, and the other that I might find half an hour's leisure before the post went out to write to Jessie. Neither was granted. No John Hervey came, and as it drew towards the evening Mrs. Weir became much worse, and I could not possibly leave her. The doctor, when he was sent for about eight o'clock, looked very grave. Mrs. Temple insisted upon coming into the room, and as Mrs. Weir was then quite insensible to what was passing it did not signify. I think she was shocked by the change that had already taken place, indeed I never saw her so really distressed, but the result was different from my expectation. Instead of declaring, as I had feared, that she would herself be head nurse, she took a sudden fright, and when the phy-

sician was gone, summoned Miss Milicent, announced her belief that it was a case of decided infection, and stated that she should leave the house and go to a neighbouring hotel. It may well be believed that no one objected; and when Louise had packed up her things, and seen her set off in a cab to an hotel in the next street, I think we one and all felt as if half the burden of our care was removed.

The next morning brought me letters from home. I read them as I went to lie down in Miss Milicent's room after my night of watching. Weary though I was, every feeling of fatigue, or inclination for sleep, was forgotten in the anxiety with which I opened them. One was from Mrs. Kemp, the other from Roger. I put the latter aside. Mrs. Kemp wrote as follows: —

"My Dear Ursie,

"It has been no want of thought or of love which has kept me from writing, but we have had busy times, with a change of servants, and Mary and I have had a good deal of needle-work on hand, besides other matters, and we wish you had been here to help us. Of course, after your letter, I have tried to have an eye upon Mrs. Roger, but she has been here very little, not more than once for the last month, and what I hear I don't take much notice of, though it is not so much to her credit as I could like, and the Farmer tells me her name is mentioned in a light way at Hove, which is to be expected if she will be so free with the Dene people. But there is nothing for me to take up or talk about to Roger, though I pity him, poor man! from my heart, and can't help seeing, as everybody else sees, that he has had a grave look of late, which he did not use to have. He is very anxious for his wife that she shouldn't over-fatigue herself, and so he must be the more vexed at her going out so much. She was dining at Dene, I heard say, last week, when Roger went to London for a day or two on business. That does not sound well in itself, besides *its being* wrong in her to leave William alone. Any how, my *dear, things* will be much better when you are at home, and

my plain opinion is that you have more claim there than you have with poor Mrs. Weir, who, they say, scarcely knows one person from another, and who, at any rate, is no relation. You won't mind my saying that, I hope, seeing we are such old friends. One thing which tells against Mrs. Roger, in everybody's opinion, is the way Mrs. Price talks about her. A person I know heard Mrs. Price say in Hove, that her marriage was all a mistake, and that she was very much in love with Mr. Macdonald at the time. I contradicted it, because I had heard from you of her having refused him, but people won't believe that, and one person, — I won't mention names for fear of making mischief, — said that Mr. Macdonald had letters in his possession which proved that she had jilted him. However, I don't believe all that the world says, and I only tell you, my dear, because you asked me to let you know everything. Now I will only repeat that it will be a happy day for us all, and a very fortunate one for Sandcombe and Mrs. Roger, when you are at home again to put things straight; so hoping to see you before long,

"I remain,

"Your affectionate friend,

"Anne Kemp.

"P. S. I have forgotten to tell you about Mary; but I take it for granted you will hear everything from John Hervey. We like Richard Bennett very much, and are well pleased upon the whole. Mary says she would rather talk than write; but she sends you her best love."

Richard Bennett! who was he? A new labourer most likely; but his name came in oddly. I put down the letter and took up Roger's. Just then there was a knock at my door, and Louise came to tell me that Mr. Hervey was in the salon, and wished to speak to me.

I must have looked like a ghost after my sleepless nights and anxious thoughts; but I went up to John Hervey with a smile on my face, for my heart was gladdened by the sight of *him.*

"Are we alone?" he said, and he looked round uneasily.

"Yes, quite. Mrs. Temple is gone, frightened by the thought of infection. Don't look so horrified, it is only her fidget; but she keeps away. Perhaps, though," I added, "you didn't know she was here."

"Yes, I have seen her. She is mad with you and me, Ursie."

"Is she?" I said. "I can't say that I care. Tell me about Mr. Weir."

"Miss Milicent has given you the story of course," he said. "She promised me she would."

"Then she did not keep her promise," I replied. "She came back and locked herself up in her room, and would say nothing to any one. It was only yesterday morning that I drew a few particulars from her."

"She is so strange," he said, "one never knows how to deal with her. I thought I had made her see the matter rightly. There was no other way of managing it, Ursie. Before I came abroad, I inquired of persons who knew our friend, Mr. Macdonald, and this M. Dalange, and I found out quite enough to convince me that they were both as great rogues as one could desire to see, and Miss Milicent's own information as to their proceedings put me on the right scent for discovering more. Since I have been in Paris, a friend has helped me to get at the whole truth. Mr. Weir, with all his shrewdness, has been fairly taken in by them. The case is a serious one as regards M. Dalange. He is accused of forgery; but that does not concern us, only I wanted, if possible, to have the affair put into the hands of the authorities quietly, so as to prevent Miss Milicent's name from being brought forward, and to save Mr. Weir from being in any way publicly disgraced. If Miss Milicent had been less wilful, it might all have been managed; but at last, as you yourself know, there was no way of saving her from becoming entangled, except by having the Frenchman seized at once. Mr. Weir has taken flight, and is off to Brussels. Though said to be innocent, I spect he feels safer there than in Paris, for the present."

"And have you explained this to Mrs. Temple?" I asked. "She came to Paris, imagining, I actually believe, that you and I were in a plot to cheat Mrs. Weir and Miss Milicent out of all their money. I don't know clearly now who put the notion into her head."

"That man, Macdonald, from what I can understand," replied John. "He was mixed up with the French business, and no doubt learned from M. Dalange that you were standing in the way of their getting possession of Miss Milicent's money. At any rate, it was a letter of his, which Mrs. Temple showed me, written to a friend of hers who has taken Stonecliff, which made her so alarmed as to what you and I were about, that she came off directly."

I thought of the scrap in Jessie's handwriting and longed to know if he had seen that also; but I could not bring myself to ask.

"This letter," continued John, "pretended to be strictly confidential, but said that it was high time that Mrs. Weir's friends should interfere, to have you recalled."

"Hypocrite!" I exclaimed; "when he himself was working to get everything into his own hands! But Mrs. Temple believed the folly, and that is not much better."

"It is too absurd to make one angry," replied John; "who can care what such a woman thinks?"

"You would not say so if you had to deal with her," I said; "she has been a thorn in my side for months."

"But she will not continue so," he replied; "I must leave Paris this afternoon, and grieve to my heart that you should bear the brunt of this trouble alone; but it will be over before long, Ursie. Whichever way it ends, you will come back to us, and be happy again."

The word happy touched me to the quick. I was very silly, but both mind and body were overworked, and I leaned my head upon the table, and my tears fell fast.

He drew near me, and his voice was kind and very soothing. He called me, dear Ursie; he said there were many *who loved me, and rested* upon me; that I was Roger's com-

fort, and Jessie's guardian angel; that I deserved happiness, and I must be happy. But my heart was very heavy, and, raising my head, I answered bitterly, as I wiped away my tears, "Ah, Mr. Hervey! it is easy for you to talk of happiness; life is bright before you. Mary Kemp will never disappoint you as Jessie has disappointed Roger."

He drew back. "Mary Kemp!" he said, "disappoint me! I don't understand you, Ursie. Mary Kemp is going to be happy, I trust, but there is no question of disappointment as far as I am concerned."

"Not when she is to be your wife?" I replied, and my burst of sorrow ended in a feeling of angry amazement.

"My wife! Ursie, you are talking wildly. Mary Kemp is engaged to my cousin, Richard Bennett. He made an offer to her just before you left England."

A sense of the ridiculous seized me, and feeling too weak to control myself, I laughed almost hysterically. But John Hervey stood by me quite grave and silent.

"Richard Bennett, I thought he was a labourer!" was my exclamation, as soon as I could recover my breath. "No wonder I was puzzled. But, Mr. Hervey, what has all the mystery been? Farmer Kemp, and Mary, and Mrs. Kemp, have all misled me. What have you had to do with the matter?"

"Merely," he replied, in the same grave tone, "that there was a difficulty, as usual, about money matters. Richard Bennett is a clerk in a counting-house, with a very good prospect of rising; but his salary was not sufficient, so the Farmer thought, to insure Mary's having a comfortable home, and I managed to have it increased. Mary is indebted to me for this, and nothing more. I can't think how you could have made such a mistake, Ursie," he added, a little bitterly, "you always spoke as if you understood, and it must have struck you as strange that I never talked about Mary."

"We have scarcely seen each other lately, if you remember," I said; "and I am afraid I was too much engrossed in my own affairs to think much about it. It was very selfish

of me," I added, for my heart reproached me; "but, indeed, Mr. Hervey, setting aside Mrs. Weir, there are other cares which may be my excuse. And then I had never heard of Mr. Bennett. He is like a man from another world."

"He saw Mary six months ago," replied John, "and said nothing, because he had nothing to offer. But Mary, as it seems, lost her heart to him, and when he did propose, the thing was soon settled."

"And you have not been in love with Mary all your life, then?" I asked.

He looked at me with an expression so wondering, earnest, and anxious, it seemed to thrill through me. "Oh Ursie!" he said, "have you thought it possible?" He paused, Mrs. Weir's bell rang, and I rushed out of the room.

John Hervey loved me! I suppose there is no woman to whom such a consciousness comes for the first time, without some feeling of pleasurable excitement; but the next moment, in my case, brought a pang of deep and most painful regret. The feeling was not returned. Yet my heart beat quickly, — my head was dizzy with emotion; and, as I entered Mrs. Weir's chamber, I could scarcely summon sufficient presence of mind to answer Miss Milicent's hasty question, whether Mr. Hervey had brought any tidings of her father.

"I think, if you please, you had better go and ask, — he will tell you everything, and I can wait here," I said; and I hurriedly took my place at the bedside, and motioned to Miss Milicent that I was willing to remain. She left me, and I was alone, able to think. Yes, he did love me; I saw it clearly as though written before me. I traced the feeling through the course of years. I felt that it had been constant and increasing. I knew that there were times, when, unconsciously to myself, I might even have given it encouragement. And I was excited, flattered, grateful, but I had nothing except gratitude to offer in return. John Hervey had not been the idol of my imagination, I had bestowed but few thoughts upon him. His presence or absence gave me nothing but a passing pleasure or pain. It seemed cold and cruel. I thought I had

deluded him, and I pictured to myself his disappointment, and longed — no one can tell how earnestly — to comfort him. Just for an instant, it even crossed my mind whether we might not be happy together, for as a friend I could have rested upon him, and found pleasure and support in his society. My dread of giving him pain was so great, that I could have made any personal sacrifice to avoid it. And life with John Hervey as a companion, would never be unhappy. But there was something required beyond this, and the very effort I made to think of him as my husband proved that it could never be my duty to accept him.

And then I smiled scornfully at myself as I remembered that I was thinking of rejection before the offer had been received. It was unmaidenly and unwomanly. But no; it was not so. I was but facing that which I believed to be a truth, and which, if I returned to say good-bye, would, I felt assured, be expressed. One moment, if I had remained, and I should have heard the full outpouring of his feelings, and have been called upon to accept or reject him. I have heard that there are some women who look upon such events as triumphs, and who, in the gratification of their vanity, forget the pain they are inflicting, and rejoice in the opportunity, for once afforded them, of placing themselves in a position superior to men. God knows, I say it in all sincerity, I am in no wise freer from vanity, or more thoughtful or tender-hearted than the generality of my sex; and yet this feeling of triumph is one into which I could never enter. A man's grief is so very terrible to witness, and surely there is nothing but exceeding pain, in seeing those to whom nature bids one look up, humbled, under any circumstances, whether of pain of body or anguish of mind. It is a false position, and as such it can never be a rightful cause for triumph. But be this as it may, I had received from Mrs. Weir, years before, a counsel which now came to my aid, and which would alone have been sufficient to guide me as to the course I was to pursue. "Remember, Ursie," she once said to me, when talking of the *possible* difficulties of my future life, "if it should ever happen

that you perceive the affection of a worthy man before he has declared it, and find yourself so circumstanced that you cannot accept him, save him, if possible, the pain of being rejected, by never giving him occasion to make the offer. It may be less flattering to yourself, but it is more generous to him." I had but little time for thought now. I expected Miss Milicent every instant to return, but my resolution, though made hastily, was not, I hope, therefore, unwise. I would not see John Hervey again, and I took up a piece of paper, and wrote instead.

"My dear Mr. Hervey,

"I am so very tired, having been up all night, that I really think I must go and lie down, and not wait till you and Miss Milicent have finished your conversation. Please not to think it unkind. I hope you will have a pleasant journey. Give them all my best love at home. I do trust to be there before long.

"Yours very sincerely,
"Ursula Grant."

It was painfully cold, almost ungracious, after the interest he had taken in me, but I felt as though the very coldness was his safeguard. If he could be quite assured of my indifference, his thoughts would turn into another channel, and, young as I was, I had had sufficient experience to be aware that the food of love is hope. Destroy the one and the other will most probably die. How anxiously I listened after Louise had taken the note, very much fearing that he would insist upon seeing me again — and yet, woman like, longing to be forced into saying something more kind; and how, afterwards, when I heard Miss Milicent speak to him in the lobby, and counted his footsteps descending the stairs, a perverse injured feeling took possession of me, and I alternately blamed myself for the foolish vanity of my suspicions, and accused him of wounded pride for having so quickly accepted my note, every one who knows the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the human heart will *easily imagine*. Any how the deed was done. I was never

to know his feelings, and vanity must from thenceforth be contented to sleep in ignorance, whether the love that had been rejected was a truth or an imagination.

I do not know whether it may appear selfish or unnatural, but it was not till John Hervey had left the house, — as I learnt from Miss Milicent, without any word of remembrance or question as to my plans, — that I recollected I had still an unopened letter from Roger to read. Then, as I once more sat alone in my chamber, with an indescribable feeling of dreariness and disappointment at my heart, I opened it, and in a few moments I was transported back to Sandcombe, satisfied, quite satisfied, that I had done rightly.

"My dearest Ursie,

"I have not written to you lately, because I have been constantly expecting you home. We none of us thought, when you left us, that you would be away so long. I don't wish to hurry you, or make you uncomfortable, but I want very much to see you. When I was in Canada I did not mind being away from you so much, because it was necessity, and you were coming out to join me; but Sandcombe is different, and there are a good many things about which we should like your opinion. It may look selfish to write in this way, when you are so usefully employed, and I had a battle with myself before I made up my mind to say anything, but I don't speak for myself only, though I could do so. We lived so many years together, dear Trot, and they were very happy ones. Women are said to have braver hearts than men, and I begin to think it must be true, for you can do better without me than I can without you. I am a man of few words, and very often I can't say things when I wish to do so; but you have been a chief blessing to me, and may God reward you for it, and make you happy. I am afraid at times I have vexed you, especially of late; but there has been no lack of love. I sorely want you home." The rest of the letter contained merely some details about the farm and housekeeping, but Jessie's name was not once mentioned.

Leave Roger and Sandcombe, and marry John Hervey! If the most devoted love that ever mortal felt had been offered me in compensation, I could not then have accepted it. There was a tone in Roger's letter, a quiet, sober sadness, which spoke to me of his disappointment far more than words. It was only disappointment; there was no anxiety. If there had been, he would have mentioned it openly, for he hated mysteries; but it was a sadness which I fancied he did not himself comprehend, and which he seemed to turn to me to explain and soothe. He was very childlike in some of his ways, at least with those whom he quite knew and trusted; his expressions of affection were always so simple and straightforward, and his penitence was the same. When he did anything wrong, or which he considered wrong, he owned it in a few words, and always without any excuses. I felt now, as though he was no match for Jessie; as if, with all his manliness and sense, and knowledge of worldly things, he was too innocent and true to be on his guard against the deception of a woman's weak, vain heart, and the gentler feelings which I had lately bestowed upon Jessie were turned into bitterness, as I thought once more how unworthy she was of him.

The letter shown me by Mrs. Temple! I had not forgotten it, though with the incessant press upon my mind I had as yet found no leisure to determine what should be done about it. I did not choose to ask questions about it, and so expose myself again to Mrs. Temple's unkind remarks. But I could not make up my mind to whom it was addressed, or for what purpose it had been written. Though it had been sent to Mrs. Temple through Mr. Macdonald, it was most probably part of some communication made to Mrs. Price. However that might be, it so increased my distrust of Jessie's prudence and openness, that I think it would have driven me home at all hazards, if I had not felt that the time was past when her folly could do harm to others, whatever it might to herself.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

Mrs. Weir's fever increased, and she was in great danger. We watched her incessantly for many days. At last she was so ill that we gave up all hope. Then there came a sudden change, and she sank to sleep and awoke exhausted, so that life could scarcely be discovered, yet calm and conscious—conscious that she was dying. For there was no thought in any of us that she would recover, and I may add, indeed, no hope, except—yes—Miss Milicent hoped. If ever there was a bitter wakening to the knowledge of neglected duties, and a wish to make amends, in the heart of any human being, it was in hers during that period of troubled watching. We were alone in the midst of the crowded world of Paris, without visitors or friends, for Mrs. Temple's suspicious guardianship was lessened by her fears, and wishing apparently to have no excuse for communication with what she considered an infected house, she had left Paris, and stationed herself at St. Germains, to be within reach whenever any change should take place. One letter had been received from her father by Miss Milicent. In it Mr. Weir made some general inquiries for his wife, and said that he was still for the present at Brussels. And now that Mrs. Weir's consciousness had returned, the difficulty was how to communicate the fact that he had again left her. This, however, was not so difficult a task as I had feared. It seems as though God were pleased at times to bestow at the close of life, a singular quietness of mind and forgetfulness of worldly anxieties to those who have long striven to please Him. And of one thing I am quite certain, that the habits of self-control and acquiescence in His will which are attained, it may be, only through long struggle, and with a constant sense of defeat, whilst the spirit is in its full energy, bring forth their perfect fruit in hours of weakness, being ripened into fulness by the sunshine of God's more abundant grace. Mrs. Weir from her nervous, susceptible temperament, her disappointments and sorrows, had passed

a troubled life; repose had been a blessing unknown to her. Even when externally there was little to disturb her, her over-scrupulous conscience, and her little whims and peculiarities, had been a fertile source of unhappiness. But she had battled with these temptations. For years she had sought to control herself, to suffer patiently, and to feel that "in quietness and confidence must be her strength;" and, latterly, forced more vigorously into the conflict by Mrs. Temple's ignorance of the human heart and natural severity of character, she had brought herself to a degree of self-denial and self-control which it was even painful to witness. I thought it hard upon her at the time, and, notwithstanding the result, I would not for worlds inflict the same penance myself, neither would I advise any other persons to attempt such a course of discipline. There are certain drugs which are dangerous poisons in our own hands, though healing medicines in the hands of a wise physician; and so there are chastisements and trials which, brought upon us by God's Providence, work for our eternal good, whilst, if inflicted by our own will, they tend to spiritual pride and narrowness of mind. If the life which Mrs. Weir led under Mrs. Temple's government had been marked out by her own conscience, it would probably have ended in some morbid delusion; as it was, though often exaggerated, and tinctured by the peculiarities of her character, there was to be found in it the spirit of simple submission and humility, and the ornament of that "meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

And now it had its reward. Yet it seems to me that there is nothing more striking, I may even say startling, than the knowledge of the "much tribulation" through which those who may truly be called the saints of God have been prepared for the enjoyment of His Kingdom. If they, so pure-minded, humble, devoted, loving, required so much sorrow, what must be needed for us, who now in health and prosperity are giving half our heart to the service of Christ, and half to the service of Mammon? As I watched Mrs. Weir gradually, hourly, sinking into her grave, I felt as though the hard probation of

centuries would never bring me to the same heavenly mind. That was a distrust of God's grace, but it was not easy to overcome it; and even the gentle tenderness and affection towards myself, shown in Mrs. Weir's every look and tone, and repeated to me in words of love which can never be forgotten, made me only feel the more my own coldness and the depth of my ingratitude towards God.

Mrs. Weir asked for her husband almost the first moment that she was restored to consciousness. Miss Milicent and I had arranged beforehand what we should say, and we told her that he had left Paris on account of some business, and that we did not think he would be able to return just yet. She received the information very quietly, and, as I thought at the time, without suspicion; but the following day, when she rallied for a few hours, she called Miss Milicent to her bedside, and made her bring a pen and ink, and write a few lines from her dictation. They were very few, and I saw the large drops fall from Miss Milicent's eyes, as she noted down the words; when they were ended, she brought the note to me, and laying it before me, said, "It's no use to deceive her, Ursie. She has a quicker sight than we have." I read, —

"Dearest George,

"Something tells me you are gone away in trouble. May God help you in it! I have never been any comfort to you. I ask your forgiveness for this, and all my other short-comings, and I thank you that you have allowed me to be with you. Our daughter, Milicent, will do more than I have ever done to make you happy. I pray you to love and cherish her. Dearest George, though I am a grievous sinner, God, of His great mercy, has given me peace through Jesus Christ. I beseech Him to give it to you also. If it had been His will, I should have been glad to tell you myself, that I am now, and have ever been, your dutiful and affectionate wife, Margaret Weir. His will be done. There is a place in Heaven for all."

After writing this note, Mrs. Weir asked no questions. It

seemed as though the earthly anxiety was not allowed to linger in her mind, and her heart was no doubt at rest, from the feeling that she had fulfilled her last duty to her husband. I was very thankful for this. If Mr. Weir had been with us, his presence must have been distressingly uncongenial, — and Miss Milicent would have felt it to be so even more than Mrs. Weir. All the good that was in her came out now, — and yet in a very painful and often strange way. Longing to nurse her mother, and do things which might make up for her neglect, she yet put me forward on every occasion, saying that she was not fit to wait upon any one so good, — but I was determined that this state of feeling should not continue, and I urged, and at last induced her to sit with her mother, and read to her just the few verses from the Psalms, or the Gospel, which were all Mrs. Weir could bear to hear. An English clergyman, who was most attentive and kind, came every day, and then Miss Milicent was obliged to speak, and take her proper place in the family; but when we joined in the prayers, she kept aloof in a distant part of the room, kneeling by herself, and with such a look in her face when she rose up! — as if the self-reproach of a whole life had been weighing upon her. It was the third day after the fever had taken a turn that I said something to her about Mrs. Temple, who had come back to Paris, and sent messages of inquiry. Somewhat of the old spirit appeared, and she said to me hastily, "There can't be any message sent except that we don't want to see her. I should run out of the house if she came in." An instant afterwards she corrected herself and added, "Yet she might have as much cause to turn away from me. Ursie Grant, I am a great sinner, and you must say some prayers for me."

I did pray for her constantly and fervently, more so than she could possibly have imagined; and now, seeing her thus moved, I ventured to say, "It might be right that Mrs. Temple should come, if she wishes it."

She stood silent; then said, "Yes, send for her," and made no other remark.

I had no fear for the meeting now. Mrs. Weir's spirit was

too near the hour of its eternal freedom to dread the presence of one connected with the remembrance of only earthly bondage. Yet I felt it right to prepare her, and I was sure that Miss Milicent would not undertake the duty. The greater part of the day was spent now in a torpor, which was nearly, though not quite, sleep. Late in the afternoon she was roused a little, and I went to her and said, "Dear Ma'am, there has been a friend anxious to see you ever since you have been ill — Mrs. Temple. She would think it kind if you would let her come."

There was just a shadow of pain on Mrs. Weir's face; then she said, "My niece is always good, Ursula, and I should like to thank her that she let me live with her. It is right of you to think of it." After this she did not close her eyes again, but seemed to be more alive to what was going on, and, fearing she might at last be restless, I sent directly for Mrs. Temple, and asked her not to delay. Yet I did not in reality expect her. After the fear of infection, which she had expressed so strongly, I thought she would be far too much afraid. I suspect now, however, that the true cause of her keeping so aloof was not fear, but wounded pride. As she could not take the upper hand and have everything her own way, she chose to give up entirely, only remaining in the neighbourhood to watch what was being done; the dread of infection, I believe, was only an excuse. But the presence of Death brings truth to us all, and Mrs. Temple, I cannot but think, was in her heart too conscious of the unkindness which she had often been guilty of, not to wish to soothe her conscience by some last tokens of thought and affection for her aunt. She came almost before I thought the message could have reached her, and we went together into Mrs. Weir's room. I felt kindly towards her then for the first time in my life. How could I do otherwise when I saw the heavenly smile on Mrs. Weir's face, and heard her say, "I gave you a great deal of trouble, Matilda; I should like you to say you forgive me."

Mrs. Temple was no monster, and genuine tears of grief,

perhaps of repentance also, moistened her eyes. "I may have seemed hard to you, dear aunt," she said. "I did for the best."

"It was all quite right. I would not have one trial less. We are going the same road, Matilda. May our dear Saviour bring us both to a happy end."

Mrs. Temple kissed her, and then asked if she would like her to pray, and the next minute I found myself joining in an extempore prayer, without any shrinking or coldness. But Mrs. Temple's feeling was real; the mode of its expression might not suit my individual taste, but her prayer was sincere, the offering of a heart which, for the moment, was simple and in earnest, and when we stand with a fellow-creature on the banks of the dark stream which flows between Time and Eternity, all differences are forgotten in the thought of the great change which "cometh alike to all."

When I rose up from my knees I felt as though I had never understood before the meaning of those words, "And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity; these three; but the greatest of these is Charity."

The next day we received the Holy Communion together. Mrs. Weir kept up wonderfully well during the service. Mrs. Temple went home afterwards. Miss Milicent was very tired, and lay down in her bed, and I sat with Mrs. Weir. Still and peaceful, though so worn and wasted, her face had recovered somewhat of the expression which I remembered when I first saw her at Dene; and oh, how my thoughts travelled back to the days which I had spent there, whilst visions of its brightness and beauty came to me like the remembrance of a happier and a holier world amidst the din of the great city of earth's distractions. I think the same memories may have haunted Mrs. Weir also, for, after remaining a long time silent, she raised her eyes to mine, and, as they sparkled with momentary brilliancy, said, "You will go back to your home, Ursula; you will sometimes be at Dene again. I love no place on earth but that. When you see it, you will remember me."

"*How could I help it, dear Ma'am?*" I said; "I am sure

being with you there was the first thing that seemed to set me forth on the right road."

"Heaven is perfect," she continued, "but earth is lovely and very pleasant. Do you remember how free the birds at Dene were; free and tame, and their songs so sweet in the wood under the hill? They seemed to come from far away over the sea to tell me of other lands; but I shall hear voices of angels soon; and, Ursula, they will sing to me of Heaven."

The last sentence was scarcely audible. There had been a sudden spring of life for the instant, but it was flickering, and fading fast. I watched her anxiously as she leaned her head back on the pillow. Her countenance changed a little, yet it was not like death. As I bent over her, listening to her breathing, I caught some indistinct words; they told me where her thoughts were resting, — on the One great Atoning Love which alone could be her help. Miss Milicent soon afterwards came in. She was more startled than I was, for she saw a greater alteration. The contrast between the stern anguish that convulsed her face, and the peaceful, though wasted, beauty of her mother's, I shall never forget. I held Mrs. Weir's hand in mine. We stood by the bedside, watching, for about twenty minutes. Then came the look which I knew too well.

"Ursula," I heard Mrs. Weir whisper; and she tried to turn her head, "is Milicent here?" The large rough hand was laid in hers. Mrs. Weir's eyes followed me; "both — blessings," she said. "God's love —" the prayer was unfinished, the breathing became scarcely audible; then it ceased, and Miss Milicent threw herself upon the bed with the bitter cry, "Oh! mother, mother!"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

I NEED not describe in detail what followed that hour of sorrow, — for sorrowful indeed it was, — most sad and desolate. Yet I could not think of myself when I saw Miss Milicent's grief. She sank under it completely. All the energy

of her nature was turned into repentance, and she exaggerated her own neglects as much as she had hitherto excused them. Mrs. Temple came every day and took all arrangements upon herself. I think she imagined I should wish to interfere, but my task was over; and I had now but one desire, to be permitted to stay till I had seen the remains of my dear and most honoured friend laid in their last resting-place. It was my hand which assisted in laying her in her coffin, and strewed over her a few late flowers, and mine was the last loving eye which gazed upon her sweet face before it was shut out from our sight for ever.

Dear lady! whether we think it or not, we all by our lives preach a sermon, either of warning or example. Hers could never be forgotten.

It was very hard for me to turn from the stillness of that death-chamber to plans for the business of life; still more hard to feel that the seas would soon roll between me and the last home of one of the best of friends. If Mrs. Weir had died at Stonecliff, I might have tended her grave myself; and the occupation would have brought back to me her holy counsels and her simple faith, and urged me forward on the path to Heaven. But it was not to be, and I could but pass beyond this temporary separation on earth, to the hope of an eternal reunion in a better world.

During the few days that followed her mother's death, Miss Milicent had kept closely to her room, refusing to admit any one. On the day of the funeral she appeared, looking very ill, but quite quiet and self-controlled. Captain Temple and she were the chief mourners. Mr. Weir dared not appear. I felt how much more worldly show than sincerity there is in such public demonstrations. Mrs. Weir's death was nothing to Captain Temple; to me it was a lifelong sorrow; yet I was obliged to keep in the background, and to remember that no one, not even Miss Milicent, could understand the depths of my grief. When we returned home, Miss Milicent called me into her room, and seizing hold of me before I was aware what she was going to do, kissed me, and said "Ursie, thank you."

and then sitting down on her black trunk, gave way to a violent burst of grief. I let it have its course, and it ended as suddenly as it had begun. She dashed away her tears, and confronting me, said abruptly, "Ursie, I am going to live with Matilda Temple."

I was startled. I had thought of what her future would be, and had supposed that of course she would join her father.

"Look," she continued, and she drew a letter from her pocket, and her lip quivered, "my father won't have me."

She had expressed the fact broadly, but it was so in reality. As I had often suspected, Mr. Weir was encumbered by his daughter's presence. He took advantage of his present untoward circumstances to inform her of it. The letter was like himself, not uncourteous, not unkind, but utterly selfish, whilst putting his determination entirely upon the ground of consideration for her. He said his movements were uncertain: he might be obliged to encounter many roughnesses which would not suit her; Mrs. Weir's death would place Miss Milicent in possession of a comfortable income, which he had no doubt she would be willing so to manage as that he himself should have enough to subsist upon, without becoming a burden to his friends. This was, perhaps, reversing the common order of things, which required that the parent should support the child, but after the many misfortunes which he had met with in life, it was his only resource. He required very little, only sufficient to give him the ordinary comforts of life without care; — and then he named a sum which took away at least two thirds of the small additional income which Miss Milicent would now inherit in addition to her own slender fortune. But she was too generous to think of this. If he had asked for it all, she would have given it cheerfully. What really distressed her was his wish to live alone. She was fond of him, and overlooked his many faults, and flattered herself that during the last year she had added materially to his happiness. To find that she had not only by her advice and encouragement assisted in bringing him into difficulties, but that she had failed to increase his comforts — and this was

most clear from the tenor of his letter, — was a most bitter blow. Poor thing! I felt for her from the bottom of my heart, and the way in which she clung to me, as though I was the only person in the world who had the slightest affection for her touched me inexpressibly.

The plan of living with Mrs. Temple, most distasteful though it unquestionably was, seemed certainly the best that could be arranged for the present. I think Miss Milicent found some satisfaction in the very fact of its being painful. She was in that unhappy self-reproachful state of mind, in which we naturally long to do penance, for our own comfort, without the slightest thought of being able to make reparation or atonement.

"I shall feel what my mother felt, Ursie," she said, "I had rather; if it were to be scourged I should be glad. Write to me sometimes; don't forget me; I could not bear that. If Matilda Temple is unbearable I must let it out to you, only my mother did not do it; she kept it all in and never complained. Oh! Ursie, Ursie, why was not I born a saint like her?"

"You may be one, you know, Miss Milicent," I said, "if you only go the same way to work, and you will have enough to exercise your patience and forbearance."

"Enough! yes, enough to try ten thousand saints; but I will put up with it, Ursie. I mean to bear it, and one ought, you know, after making friends as we have lately. But she will worry me out of my life. She means to travel, — I like travelling, I don't like anything else; but I can't endure being worried."

This travelling notion was a new one, and I thought it sounded well. Miss Milicent explained that Mrs. Temple wished to remain on the continent for a year or two. It was a plan of economy. "And perhaps we may meet with my father somewhere; perhaps he may join us, — that would be a comfort, Ursie," said Miss Milicent, catching hold of the least vestige which remained of her former life.

I did not throw doubt on her hopes, rather I encouraged

her to look at the plan in the most hopeful light. I knew she would have quite sufficient wretchedness to undergo when I was gone, and she had no one to whom to open her heart, to require all the support which a sanguine nature could give. But my mind was certainly relieved by the present plan, and I ventured to look further into futurity, and to suggest to Miss Milicent that if, after her return to England, she had a fancy to live by herself, she might take a cottage at Compton, renew her duties in the parish, and allow me occasionally to see her, and talk over old times and happier days. I think this prospect soothed her more than anything else. She shook my hand with both hers, and told me that she had always felt I had been sent to be a blessing to them, and she wished she had followed my advice before; there was no person in all the world she depended upon so thoroughly.

"I was not much comfort to any one in the old days, when you first knew me, Miss Milicent," I said. "Do you remember your lesson about the darned stocking? I behaved worse than you knew then."

"Ah! Ursie, you went my way, you were wilful; but you turned back soon. It was at Dene, I recollect; those were pleasant days; there is no place like Dene!"

"None," I repeated, earnestly.

"So my mother thought," she continued; "well! some day I may go back and see it, — only it may be all changed."

"We needn't look forward," I said; "often places remain unchanged for very long."

"Some do, some do; I don't think Dene will. It will come to ruin, and be forgotten like us;" she paused. "There! Ursie, that's for you;" and pushing into my hand a beautiful mourning ring, containing some of her mother's hair, Miss Milicent opened the door, motioned me from the room, and the interview ended. Many persons would have thought her not only strange, but cold; others might have said she had no religious feeling, no earnestness; but I knew her better. There was sincerity of purpose underneath all this roughness; a struggle with her own self-will; a humbling

consciousness that she had done wrong; a willingness to accept whatever might be in store for her in the dispensation of God's Providence. It was as much as I expected. As Miss Milicent herself expressed it, she certainly was not born a saint, and it was hard to expect her to become one all at once.

Mrs. Temple was civil to me all this time. I believe that which weighed with her in my favour more than any other circumstance, was the fact that Mrs. Weir had not put by any money for me, or left me any remembrance except a copy of Bishop Jeremy Taylor's sermons. Her fortune was entailed upon Miss Milicent, and with regard to any personal property, her will had been drawn up several years before, and latterly she had been far too nervous and ill to make any change in it. I don't remember that a thought of what might be left me had ever crossed my mind, but certainly I was very much relieved that things were as they were, when I found that one of Mrs. Temple's constant fears was, that I should in some way, I really don't know how, induce her aunt to favour me to the disadvantage of her relations.

After Mrs. Weir's will was read, her manner visibly changed; and I was not in a mood to bear malice, and was willing to accept the alteration, and be thankful for it. I was, however, only a useless burden to the family now, and in spite of Miss Milicent's entreaties that I would stay just for the few remaining days they were in Paris, I made my preparations for leaving without delay. Captain Temple procured my passport; Mrs. Temple, though she made no apology for her accusations, paid me the money that was due, and said that she believed I had tried to do my duty; Louise gave me innumerable instructions about the Custom House, and Miss Milicent accompanied me to the railway station.

The French practice of not allowing any person to go upon the platform except those who intend to travel was a real trial to us both. We lingered together as long as we possibly could, saying very little, but each, I am sure, feeling that every moment was crowded with dear and hallowed remem-

brances; till at last, looking at her watch, Miss Milicent drew me to the door which led to the waiting-room, once more kissed me, muttered a hasty "Now, Ursie, go, — God bless you:" — and we parted.

As I placed myself in the railway carriage, I felt that Paris would from thenceforth be a dream; that my real life lay at Sandcombe.

CHAPTER LXXV.

The journey was long and uncomfortable. It is surprising to me now how I managed it as I did; but I had received full instructions, and having no one to think of but myself, I was free from nervousness. That is a great help always. I suppose we scarcely know how heavy is the burden of responsibility for others, even when all seems to go well, until it is for a time removed. It was perfect rest, in spite of the bodily discomfort, to lie still in my berth, as we crossed from Havre to Southampton, feeling that I was not answerable for the well-being of any single individual on board the vessel; not till I had again landed on English ground, and felt myself drawing near home, did the cares of life begin again to press upon me. In the interval I had gained strength for whatever was to come. Roger was to meet me in Hove. I had written to make the appointment, not at the station, but in the town, where he had business; and as the omnibus, which took me from the railway station, stopped at the court-yard of the Red Lion, I saw the Sandcombe chaise just ready to be brought out. A few moments afterwards, Roger himself appeared at some little distance down the street. I forgot all proprieties, and ran forward to meet him.

"Well! my little Trot! there are some things blessings in life," and Roger drew my arm within his, hurried me on, and as soon as we were safe within the shelter of the inn-yard, gave me such a greeting as I certainly had not received since I left England.

I looked up at him then anxiously, but he did not seem in any way altered, his face had just the same honest brightness in it, and as I kept my eyes fixed upon him, and said, "I had been away such a long, long time," he laughed, and asked me, if I thought his hair would have turned grey in three months. I don't know what I thought, but it was certainly a relief to see him apparently so unchanged. I asked after Jessie; he answered me rather shortly, but not as if he was troubled about her. "She was very tolerably well," he said; "she had been doing a little too much lately; but now that I was returned all would be right," and then he hurried me into the chaise, observing that we should be late home, and the nights were cold and dark. All the way to Sandcombe, we talked incessantly about everything, and everybody. I said the most, but that was natural, there was so much to tell, and Roger kept on asking me all kinds of questions. I felt it would be unkind to trouble him with my grief for Mrs. Weir; he would have sympathised with it, but it would have marred the happiness of our meeting; and besides, the feeling was becoming sacred, it could not be approached except at certain times, and under certain circumstances, so I dwelt principally upon things which I thought would amuse him. He had never been in France, and was interested in my descriptions of the people and the places I had visited, though in truth I had seen very little, and certainly not enough to enable me to form an opinion. "I won't tell you what I think about the country myself," I said, in answer to his inquiry, "for I don't seem to know it. Some things there are in it which I like very much, and others very little, and I suppose that is the case with most other countries that are different from one's own. Louise has an English friend, a lady's maid, who declares that it 'is inside out, and upside down, and all wrong;' but that is because she was so scandalised at the way they spend their Sundays."

Roger laughed. "Well!" he said, "I don't think France would suit me in that way, and, by the by, Ursie, you remind me that we are getting out of some of our good ways at Sand-

combe. Jessie has been too tired, since you have been away, to hear Esther Smithson read, and I have a fear that she is not quite so steady as she was."

"She might be made to read to herself, if Jessie is not able to hear her," I said, "but it takes only a short time."

"Yes," and he became thoughtful. "Two pair of hands are better than one, Ursie. They will feel that at Longside when Mary is gone."

"When is she to be married?" I asked. "She has treated me shamefully, and not written to me once."

"A letter is a trouble to her, I suppose, as it is to me. I believe the wedding is to come off early in April. Somehow, Trot, I can't help thinking that John Hervey and she have made rather a mess of it. John has altered since this affair has been settled. He came back from France with all his spirits gone, and looking quite ill."

"Indeed!" I answered; I did not trust myself to say more, though I was terribly conscience-stricken.

"John says so little about himself at any time," said Roger, "it is not easy to get at what he thinks, in spite of his open ways. It strikes me sometimes, Trot, that there is nothing more deceiving in this world than that sort of manner which makes you think you know persons thoroughly at first sight."

Roger spoke as if he was a little aggrieved, and I taxed him with it.

"No!" he said, "I have nothing to find fault with, except perhaps, that John does not come over to Sandcombe as he used to do, and is always busy. Change must come, I suppose, in all ways," and he sighed. "I remember the time when John Hervey wouldn't have kept back a thought from me."

"Perhaps he finds that you keep back some from him," I said. "A married man is different from a single one, Roger."

He became quite silent, and continued so for a long time. I thought it a bad sign, and fell into a train of thought in con-

sequence. When he spoke again, it was only to complain of the roughness of the lane leading off the down, for we were fast drawing near to Sandcombe.

"Is that Jessie?" I exclaimed, as I saw in the dusk a figure standing in the entrance passage.

Not Jessie, — it was Esther Smithson. Jessie was waiting for me in the parlour. I hurried in; Roger followed me closely.

"I have brought her home, you see," he said. "She was punctual to her time to a minute."

"Not like me," said Jessie, approaching to assist me in unfastening my cloak. Her tone was a little sharp.

"I don't know that I said so," was Roger's quick reply. "Sit down by the fire, Trot, and warm yourself. Jessie, what have you got for her for tea? She must be starving, for we had not time to have anything in Hove."

"There is some cold meat, I believe," said Jessie.

"It ought to be hot," replied Roger. "Isn't there some broth in the house? You would like a basin of broth, Ursie?"

"Yes; I really think I should very much," I said. "I have learnt to like potage, as the French call it, from never having had a dinner without it for the last two months."

"We are not up to French soups, I am afraid," said Jessie, slowly moving to the door. "I don't know whether there is any broth; but I will go and see."

"I'll go," said Roger, hurrying after her. "You sit still, Jessie, and hear all that Ursie has to tell. And where is William? He will be wishing to see her."

"William was here just now," said Jessie. "But, Ursie, dear, had not you better go upstairs and take off your things, and make yourself comfortable, and then come down and talk afterwards?" It was the wisest plan certainly, and I followed the suggestion, Jessie lingered over the fire, and Roger called out, "I will take her boxes upstairs. Just see, Jessie, that tea is got ready, will you?" And seizing the smallest box, he carried it up before me, and uncorded it.

"Jessie isn't strong," he said, in a tone of apology, "and we are obliged to be careful of her. She will be quite a different person now you are come back, Ursie."

"I can scarcely judge how she looks," I said, "having only seen her by fire-light. You are not anxious about her?"

"No; not exactly." And there was the same sudden silence as before, when Jessie's name was mentioned. Yet Roger did not seem at all inclined to leave me. His way of lingering made me think of Jessie's arrival after her marriage, and I don't know what kind of feeling came over me, as he sat down on my trunk, looking at me whilst I took off my bonnet, and not offering to go till I said to him, laughingly, that I should think he had been to France himself, and learnt to make a parlour of a bed-room. It was scarcely pleasure, though yet it was very pleasant, to find him so glad to have me at home again. It was more a sense of unfitness, as if I was receiving an affection which was not my due.

The tea-table was certainly the most comfortable sight I had seen since I went away; and William's welcome was nearly as hearty as Rogers. "Home is home, be it never so homely," says the proverb; and my heart bounded with thankfulness, as I thought of the many blessings to which I had been permitted to return. By candle-light I was able to examine more closely the countenances in which I was so deeply interested. William was looking remarkably well; but his eyes, he told me, were as bad as ever. He was beginning to employ himself in knitting; there were so many hours when he was forced to be within doors, and Jessie was not able to read aloud much. Roger — I was not satisfied about him. The happy look which had cheered me when we first met was gone now. He had his old grave face, — the face belonging to the latter days of our life at Dene, when he was projecting his expedition to Canada. I could gather but little from it, however. Roger's uniform sobriety of manner was as repelling to curiosity as other persons' perpetual brightness. Jessie I not only looked at, but watched most carefully. She was a

greater problem than Roger. She looked thin, and ill, and unhappy; but the unhappiness I knew was not necessarily mental; for whenever her finger ached she was miserable. It was her manner to Roger, and his to her, which I felt I must study, if I wished to discover how things really stood between them; and here, again, there was much to perplex me. Roger was very attentive, extremely thoughtful about her; no one could have been more so; but it was a thoughtfulness which rather distressed me; it seemed as though there was too much duty in it. And Jessie was grateful, but absent in manner, and a little inclined to take offence, as she seemed to expect him to find fault with her.

They were the merest trifles which gave me these impressions; no one but myself probably would have noticed them; and we had a pleasant cheerful evening, and stayed up talking much later than usual; and when at last I went to my room, I was too tired to be kept awake even by anxiety.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

I HAD made up my mind that I would have an explanation with Jessie, directly I found myself at home. Three weeks went by, Christmas came and passed, and the New Year opened upon us, and still there was a mysterious silence between us. I hope it was not my fault; I can scarcely accuse myself, strictly speaking, of want of moral courage; but Jessie had the most singular and ingenious way of avoiding the dreaded subject; and twice, when we drew so near that my next question would certainly have been an entreaty that she would open her mind to me, she became so painfully agitated, that I actually dreaded to make the experiment again. And all this time there was nothing exactly to remark upon in her way of going on, but only a half-hidden and unceasing restlessness, which made every occupation a burden and every conversation wearisome, and which often compelled Roger to turn to me for the assistance and sympathy which it seemed in vain to expect from her.

It was the beginning of January, a Saturday; Roger was gone to Hove, and we did not expect him home till late. We had our tea, and prepared a little hot supper for him, for he was likely to come in cold and hungry. There had been somewhat of a press in the money-market for some weeks; every one was feeling it, and Roger, with all his prudence, could not hope to escape better than his neighbours. The farmers generally were grumbling, but Roger never grumbled, he only looked a little thoughtful, and begged me to keep an eye upon the house expenses. We were all listening particularly for Roger, on account of this uneasiness in our minds, though any misgiving we had was more for others than ourselves; and all at the same moment caught the sound of his horse's hoofs coming down the lane. I rather made way for Jessie, thinking she would hurry out to meet him; but finding she did not, I went out myself.

"Well! what news?" I said, as I helped him off with his great coat.

"Not so good as it might be, but nothing to affect us. I am later home than you expected, I suppose."

I was always painfully quick in understanding Roger's tone. He did not wish to dwell upon the subject, and I left it to William to ask disagreeable questions. Jessie and I laid out the supper, and gave him some hot beer, for he was bitterly cold, and stood in front of the fire saying nothing, very much as though his words were frozen also.

"Eat your supper," said William, good-naturedly; "and then tell us your news. We are all willing to wait."

"I have no money news that concerns us," answered Roger. "Every one is complaining and talking, and saying a great deal which had better not be said. Jessie, my dear, if you are tired, you had much better go to bed."

"But I should like to wait and hear what you have to tell," said Jessie.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," said Roger; "except that there has been a run upon a London bank, which you won't understand anything about."

"I know that people are very often ruined by such things," said Jessie.

"We are not ruined, my dear, nor any of our friends; so you need not distress yourself about it; but go," and he lighted a candle for her.

I think she felt as though she was treated like a child, and I felt the same, and was a little inclined to blame Roger for carrying on the old system of making her a plaything. But no one would have thought this night that there was any idea of play in his mind; and as soon as Jessie was out of the room both William and I exclaimed, "There is something, Roger; for pity's sake, let us have it out."

"If the world could have its tongue stopped!" he said, quietly helping himself to a mutton-chop, very much as though he had no appetite for it. "That scamp, Mr. Macdonald, and John Hervey have had a quarrel."

"A quarrel," I exclaimed — "what about?" — and my heart beat very fast as a host of absurd fears and fancies crowded into my mind.

"It is almost more than I can tell, — what about," — replied Roger. "I didn't hear the beginning. They were in the coffee-room at the Red Lion, — your name was brought in, Ursie."

I started from my seat. "Mine! my name brought in by Mr. Macdonald!"

"Don't be frightened, Trot," said Roger, speaking with forced quietness, "the man's a rogue, and every one knows it, and the utmost he could say against you was that you had kept poor Mrs. Weir from falling into his clutches; and for this I thought John Hervey would have knocked him down."

"He needn't have troubled himself to do that," I said; "Mr. Macdonald is beneath the notice of any right-minded person."

"Quite," said Roger; "but he was insolent, and half tipsy, and there was no knowing how to deal with him."

Roger's manner was strange still. I did not feel as though he had told us all.

"I wish it hadn't happened on a Saturday, and at the Red Lion," said William; "reports get about so oddly. But tell us all about it. I don't understand."

"I shall only vex, Trot," said Roger, kindly; "and the thing is past now."

"I would rather hear," was my reply; "I may have to defend my own cause, so I may as well know what accusations are brought against me."

Still Roger hesitated. "I think I had better leave it to John Hervey," he said; "I begged him to come over on Monday and explain, and he promised he would. He took your part gallantly, Trot."

"He would be sure to do that," said William. "If it wasn't that we have all been thinking him in love with Mary Kemp up to within the last month or two, I should have said that he had a considerable fancy for Ursie."

This was more than I could endure, and the idea of a long private explanation with John Hervey upon matters so nearly concerning myself, actually made me tremble.

"I don't choose to wait till Monday," I said; "I wish to hear all there is to tell to-night. I shall not sleep the worse for it, Roger, for I have nothing on my conscience."

"Nothing," he said, patting my shoulder affectionately, "I'll answer for that, and so will any one who has known my little Trot as long as I have. But at the best you will only get a rigmarole story from me, Ursie. I went into the coffee-room, and found John Hervey and Mr. Macdonald at high words. As far as I could gather, the conversation had begun about banks and speculations, and Macdonald boasted, so I was told, of some of his, not rightly knowing, as you may believe, what he said; and John Hervey took him to task, being aware that they were not much better than frauds. I told him afterwards that he would have done better to let the man alone; but he said, he felt it right to speak out, because of some present who were listening, and might have gone away with a false impression. Well! Macdonald got angry, and was impertinent, and accused John in return. I heard that myself. He was not

enough in his senses to make what he said quite plain, but the upshot of it was that you, Ursie, and John Hervey had been in league to defraud poor Mrs. Weir, and had actually got a large sum of money from her."

I laughed; the idea was too absurd to make me angry.

"It wouldn't signify if there had been no one by to hear," said William; "but I suppose the room was full."

"There were two or three men there, most of them Macdonald's friends, and they backed him up."

"And what did you do?" I said; "you couldn't stand by quietly and hear such atrocious falsehoods uttered about your sister?"

"You had a champion in John who needed no support," said Roger; "but you needn't fear, Trot, but that I gave all the help in words I could — till" — he hesitated —

"Till what?" I asked. "Speak out, Roger, I am able to stand up against anything Mr. Macdonald may say."

"Till" — and Roger's voice grew quite hoarse and hollow — "till he declared that my wife had told him everything, and that he could produce letters from her in proof; and then I gave him the lie direct, and turned him out of the room."

I was quite silent. William exclaimed, "Bravo!"

Roger rose from the table, took out a memorandum book, and began to make some notes in it. There was an awkward silence, and I asked if he had finished his supper.

"Yes, quite."

I cleared the table, and the servants were called in to prayers.

Roger read as calmly as usual; there was no indication in his voice of any trouble in his mind, but when I looked at his face as we rose from our knees, I felt I dared not ask him any more questions, and I bade him good night. My kiss must have told him what I could not express in words.

I heard him come upstairs, very soon after me. I was not surprised at that, for William was not likely to perceive that certain subjects could not be approached, and Roger would be thankful to escape from him. Jessie's room joined mine; I often

wished that it did not, for I could not help sometimes hearing the tone in which she and Roger conversed, though no words were intelligible. I tried not to listen this evening, but the very effort seemed only to increase my natural quickness of hearing. First came a few light observations, then something like an anxious inquiry from Jessie, and grave words in answer. Questions and replies followed quickly, and at last a longer speech from Roger, in a voice which struck me as though he were trying to keep his feelings under control. A quick, faint answer from Jessie succeeded, and a burst of hysterics.

The next minute Roger knocked at the door of my chamber. "Ursie! Trot! can you let me in?" and I admitted him. He looked very much distressed and frightened.

"Have you any sal volatile? Can you go to Jessie? Poor little darling! I ought to have prepared her better, but she would know. That good-for-nothing wretch! but I won't think of him. Go to her, Ursie; you can manage her." He followed me into Jessie's room; I forced her to take the medicine, and spoke to her rather decidedly upon the necessity of controlling herself, and for a moment she was calm. But when Roger addressed her in his gentle, tender way, the excitement returned again. "Just leave her to me," I said, at last, "we shall do nothing while you are here. Go down stairs, and when she is better again, I will call you;" and after some hesitation, and many words of fondness, he consented, and Jessie and I were left alone.

As I had expected, she recovered herself then, at least, to a certain degree, but this was no common attack of hysterics. I could insist upon her being quiet, and she was so, but when she sat quite still, the expression of her face showed the most intense mental suffering. After seeing her comfortably in bed I was going to tell Roger that she was better, when she grasped my hand, and said in a faint voice, "Ursie, you know."

"Yes," I said, gravely, "indeed I know; but it may be *better* not to talk to-night."

"*Stay*, stay," she exclaimed, fancying I was going to leave

her. "I have told him. Ursie, he knows that the only letter that could have been meant was to Mrs. Price."

"Was it, really?" It might have been hard in me, but there was doubt in my tone. Yet she was not indignant.

"Yes, indeed, indeed; oh! Ursie, I am very miserable."

"Why?" I asked; and still there was a lingering suspicion in my mind. "Is Roger so angry at your having written foolishly to Mrs. Price?"

"Oh! no, no; he has forgiven; he does not think — Ursie, it really was to Mrs. Price."

"You have told me so before, dear Jessie," I replied. "I confess I am relieved, for Mrs. Temple herself showed me when I was in Paris a portion of the letter which I suppose was alluded to, and certainly gave me to understand, though I did not believe her then, that it had been written by you to Mr. Macdonald."

"It was a letter I wrote to Mrs. Price once when she was in London," said Jessie. "It was very foolish of me to say what I did, but she was always asking about you; and I did not mean any harm, Ursie, indeed I didn't."

"It was foolish," I said, "but not, of course, the same as it would have been if you had written about our private affairs to Mr. Macdonald. Jessie, dear, if you have told all, go to sleep now, and to-morrow talk the matter over quietly with Roger. Don't be afraid."

"Wouldn't you be afraid?" she said. "Wouldn't you really care?"

"Not if it was merely a thoughtless letter to Mrs. Price."

"But if — Ursie, I did not speak at once, when Roger asked me to assure him that it was all false, — and his look — oh! it was so terrible."

"Terrible, without cause then," I said. "Jessie, you wrong Roger by being so afraid of him."

"You would be afraid if you were like me; but you are his sister, not his wife."

"And, as a wife's love is greater than a sister's," I said, "so *should her confidence* be greater also. Jessie, dear, you

have had something upon your mind for months, — you have acknowledged this to me; I don't ask what it is, but I entreat you to take advantage of the present opening, and confess everything to Roger."

She turned her face away from me, and I heard her murmur, "I could have told you."

"Then let me hear," I said; "but remember, Jessie, that Roger must know at last, and who is to tell him so well as yourself?"

"I didn't mean — I didn't think about it. Oh! Ursie, they have used me cruelly."

"I suppose you mean Mrs. Price and Mr. Macdonald," I said. "I could not be surprised at anything they did."

"So unkind!" persisted Jessie, "to turn my words against me, and bring you into difficulty; I never thought they would have done so."

She was wandering from the important point, and I recalled her. "Don't trouble yourself about anything that concerns me, dear Jessie," I replied. "Nothing which Mr. Macdonald can say will affect me, for my conscience is free, at least on all points in which he can have any concern."

"Free!" murmured Jessie. "Oh! how happy."

"And you may be happy too, dearest Jessie," I said, "if —"

She interrupted me.

"Happy! Oh! never, never. Ursie, you don't know. He can't forgive."

"He can and will forgive everything," I replied. "He must do so," I added, rather weakening my own words, for I felt as though there might be some things, — deceit amongst them, — which it would be almost impossible for a husband to forgive, at least, in such a sense as to feel the same trust as before.

She took up the expression.

"He must! but if he shouldn't, Ursie, it would break my heart."

Just then Roger knocked at the door rather impatiently. Jessie trembled all over.

"Take courage," I whispered; "pray that you may be helped. Dearest Jessie, it can but be worse by delay."

"I can't, Ursie; stay with me; don't leave me."

Another knock. I forcibly withdrew my hand, kissed her tenderly, and, with a prayer that God would aid her, turned away.

The voices in the room adjoining mine were again heard; the tone of the conversation was lower than before; at times it seemed to cease; and then it began again. I could gain nothing from it. I lingered and waited, — cold, and tired, and uneasy, expecting I scarcely knew what, and at last went to bed.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

I DREADED the next morning more than I can tell. All the time I was dressing I was trying to guess what trouble might be in store for me, but Roger's face, when we met at breakfast, was a cordial to my heart. He was always very happy on a Sunday. He had a knack, which I could never attain, of putting aside anything which troubled him, and never allowed himself to be distressed with earthly cares on the one day of heavenly rest; and to my great astonishment, his cheerfulness on this morning was particularly marked, and his first words were:

"Jessie has slept well; she is rather tired though, and not going to get up to breakfast;" and then he added, "she is a forgiving little woman, she won't let me give that fellow, Macdonald, the dressing he deserves. But I must make him eat his own words, for her sake, though really no one, except his worthless companions, would believe anything he said."

"I suppose I may go to her after breakfast," I observed.

"*Yes, if she is* awake; but I promised not to let her be

disturbed, as she was still drowsy. She won't be able to go to church to-day, and I think I shall stay and read to her now, and go myself in the afternoon."

I can't say how strange it was to me that he could take what had happened thus quietly. I fancied him so sensitive that the least imputation on his wife would have driven him nearly wild. It was evident that something had occurred to make such thoughts secondary. He insisted upon carrying up Jessie's breakfast himself, and stayed with her for some time. When he came down he said she complained of a little headache, and he thought it was better perhaps to let her be quiet, and for me not to go to her. William went out before church, and I had several things to attend to. Roger took up a book in the parlour, but I soon saw him saunter into the garden, and pace up and down the middle walk in the sunshine. When I was ready for church I joined him there.

"It is a blessed day, is it not, Trot?" he said, putting his hand fondly on my shoulder. "Doesn't it often strike you how quiet everything is on a Sunday in the country, as if the very birds and insects knew that it was a time of peace?"

We stood still and listened. Very far off there was a soft, soothing murmur, the plash of the waves as they reached the shore, but no other sound broke the stillness.

"I could not bear to be without that one sound," he said. "It is like the breathing of a human being, a sign of life which can scarcely be called sound. And it does not disturb one. God is very gracious," he added, looking up reverently to the sky, "to give one hours like these after days of storm. Yesterday was a tempest to me, Trot, but it is all passed now, as though it had never been."

"Except," I said, "that you must have an explanation with Mr. Macdonald."

"Yes, I know; but don't talk about him. I shall soon make him retract. And, Ursie, he can't trouble me, — nothing can, whilst my darling —" He stopped.

"Go on," I said, and I laughed, kindly. "Don't be ashamed to show that you are as weak as other men."

"Well, I suppose it is weakness," he said, like myself, laughing a little. "But life would be worth little without it. And Ursie, when people are first married, there is a good deal to learn."

"They are making discoveries in unknown lands," I replied; "at least, so John Hervey says."

"Does he? Well, he is right. I hope before long he may have the opportunity of travelling on his own account. At least, if he is sure of coming to the same result as myself."

"Dearest Roger," I said, "no one can be so thankful as I am that you are happy."

He was silent at first, but after a few moments of consideration, said, "You must not misunderstand me, Ursie. Neither John Hervey nor any one else can expect to find perfection, — only love," he added, and his tone sank as though he shrank from saying so much even to me.

"Jessie does love you devotedly," I said; "no one can doubt that."

"No one, no one," he said, hastily. "But, Ursie, you women are problems, and often make us unjust."

"Because we are inconsistent," I said.

"You show the worst part of yourselves in everyday life. There seems to be a mist of petty weaknesses over you, and then comes disappointment in consequence, till a storm arises, — then you shine out like the sun."

"I dare say you are right," I said. "And so one ought to be thankful for the storm?"

"Most thankful!" he replied. "I could say it to no one but you, Ursie; I never knew how Jessie loved me till last night."

I don't think I was ever more perplexed in my life as to what I should answer. The whole conversation was so entirely different from anything I had anticipated. My silence appeared like want of sympathy, but I could not speak. William's appearance at the further end of the walk was an immense relief, and, hastening towards him, I made him take my arm. Whether Roger noticed anything uncomfortable in

my manner, I can't say. I believe he was too much at peace that morning with God, the world, and himself, to be disturbed by anyone. Even Mr. Macdonald was put aside for a future day of reckoning.

William and I went to church together. I told Roger that possibly I might not return till after the afternoon service, for Mrs. Richardson had made a proposal to me to take a class at the afternoon Sunday school, and I was anxious if possible to oblige her. With Jessie to share my duties at home, I thought it might be managed. In case I did this, Mrs. Richardson had kindly said she would give me luncheon at the parsonage. It was not certain that I should be wanted till the next Sunday, but it was as well to be prepared. All the way to church I was obliged to talk to William, and he would bring forward the disagreeable subject of Mr. Macdonald. Roger, he said, bore the matter too quietly; the man was a rascal, and deserved to be prosecuted for a libel. "Roger takes to heart what was said about Jessie much more than what concerns you though, Ursie," added William, "and that aggravates me, I confess; for, after all, Jessie might have been a little foolish and gossiping, but nothing worse could be brought against her. It was not like accusing you of fraud."

"That notion is so simply absurd," I said, "that I really don't trouble myself about it."

"I can't help wishing that John Hervey had not made such a disturbance," persisted William. "It spreads the thing; I always thought him rather hot-headed. The only excuse is, as I said last night, Ursie, that he certainly has a half-liking for you; why shouldn't you make up to each other?" he added; turning round upon me sharply.

I replied, "Merely, I suppose, because it does not suit us."

"Not suit you! But why shouldn't it? He has a comfortable income of his own, and is getting on in his business. And if there come some little Rogers and Jessies, Sandcombe won't be large enough to hold us all."

Very like William that was! Putting things just in the *way most* likely to fret me; and yet not imagining himself,—

or indeed, meaning to be, otherwise than very good-natured, I took the first opportunity of changing the conversation, and soon afterwards we reached the church. There are times when past days come back to one, seemingly without cause; and the sight of the school children under the gallery brought to me the recollection of Miss Milicent, and the first time I saw her in Compton Church, dressed in the cloth jacket and red handkerchief, and trying to awe us all into order. I felt that I should very much like to see her again, for my heart clung tenderly to the days associated with the remembrance of her; and the loss of Mrs. Weir left still a blank at my heart, which nothing could fill. Country churches remain for years unaltered, and Compton Church was precisely the same now as it was in those old days, except that a new generation of little figures might be seen on the wooden benches. I was glad to think that I should have to teach them; it gave me a fresh interest, and when Mrs. Richardson came up to me after the service, and said she should be much obliged if I could stay, I was very willing to accede. William, I knew, would find his way home with the farm people; but just as he was setting forth, I saw John Hervey join him, and they entered into conversation. I was turning away to follow Mrs. Richardson, and feeling thankful to have an excuse for escaping from John, when William called to me. "Ursie, where are you marching to? Have you no thanks to give your champion?"

John's colour came up into his face, in a manner which was perfectly distressing. Indeed, I am not sure, whether to see a man blush is not worse than to see him shed tears. He put out his hand, drew it back, and stammered, and at last burst into a fit of laughter — really, I believe, because he did not know what else to do; for certain I am there was no mirth in his merriment.

I was very conscious, — which is a most uncomfortable feeling at all times — and in my wish to be quite at ease, I said something which I am very nearly sure was nonsense. At any rate it made William interpose with: — "Well! if

you two are not the strangest beings, one would think you had never met before. Ursie, surely you can say, 'Thank you,' to a man who took your part as John Hervey did last night."

"I don't think Mr. Hervey needs words," I said; "he must know how grateful I am; only it is not a very pleasant subject to enter upon."

"Indeed it is not!" exclaimed John. "I wouldn't have a word said, except — I am afraid, Ursie, I must ask to have a few minutes' conversation with you."

"We will wait till to-morrow," I said; feeling myself at the same time to be the most cold, ungrateful creature living.

There was a tone of mournful bitterness in John's voice, as he said, "I am quite aware that I am urging you against your will, but to-morrow it will be too late."

"I must leave you to settle matters your own way," said William, "or I shall not be in time for dinner. Ursie, I shall send Roger to church in the afternoon, and he can walk home with you."

I was left standing in the road with John Hervey, the villagers watching us. Six months ago I should no more have cared for this than I should for being seen holding a conversation with William or Roger; but now it made me uncomfortable, and in order to escape it, I said, "We cannot stay here. Perhaps you would not mind coming down to the Parsonage with me. Mrs. Richardson would let us have our conversation there, I am sure."

"Just as you wish," he said quietly, and we walked on together.

Mrs. Richardson was a very simple-minded person, who never suspected any one of a double meaning, and when I went to her and told her that Mr. Hervey and I had a few words to say to each other, and that I did not like standing about in the road, she offered us at once to go into the schoolroom, whilst her children were having their dinner in the dining room. "And something shall be kept hot for you, *Ursula*," she added kindly, "though don't be long, or you *will have* no time to eat it." So John Hervey and I were once

more doomed to a private interview, though happily we had a definite subject to talk about, which I felt to be a safeguard as long as we could keep to facts.

John began the conversation with another excuse for having forced it upon me, but I cut him short.

"There is no occasion to say anything of that kind," I observed; "you have been very good to me, Mr. Hervey, in taking up my cause, and I am only sorry that you should have been called upon to do it. But to say that I care much for what a man like Mr. Macdonald may choose to assert when he is tipsy, would be untrue, and I should be glad to be certain that you felt as indifferent about it as I do."

"It is not for you to care, Ursie, nor for me," he replied. "If one troubled oneself about false reports, life might be miserable. I thoroughly frightened Macdonald last night, and I have good reason to believe that he will never venture to repeat his falsehoods. If he does, I have the means of punishing him in my own hands. But he said something about your sister-in-law which unfortunately is true. She did write to him when you were away. It was from her that he learnt what your movements were likely to be, and by that means they were communicated to M. Dalange."

"Begging your pardon," I said, "I think you are under a mistake. Jessie wrote one note to Mrs. Price, part of which I saw. It was sent, I believe, to Mrs. Temple, by whom I don't know, with the long letter from Mr. Macdonald, which you yourself read in Paris. There was a thoughtless observation in it about my influence with Mrs. Weir, and Jessie is very sorry she made it, but as for anything more of consequence having transpired through it, I am all but certain that it is impossible."

"I wish I could believe it," said John earnestly. "I wish to my heart I could believe it. But Macdonald, as you know, talks about it, and it is unquestionable that everything you and I planned was told immediately to Macdonald, and through him to his French friend, who came to Paris expressly, because he knew that I was daily expected and was

afraid that I might be working against him. Mrs. Temple also, as you are aware, was sent there in the same way. It is a pity that you were not more cautious in what you wrote."

"It is a pity," I replied, "yet what I said was very little; nothing indeed that I can remember, except that we meant to leave certain places on certain days, and that Miss Milicent was going to consult you about some of her affairs. And I wrote quite privately to Roger, thinking, of course, that nothing which was mentioned would go beyond our own circle. It never entered my head to say, 'Don't show it to Jessie.'"

"It did go beyond your own circle," said John, "but that is not your fault, Ursie. Only indeed I am very sorry about your sister-in-law."

"But it is not true," I said; "forgive me for speaking hastily, Mr. Hervey, but I can't help it. It is all an exaggeration." Then recollecting the short conversation which had passed between myself and M. Dalange at Andely, I added "M. Dalange once mentioned Jessie to me, and implied she had been staying at Dene, and that was entirely untrue. He thought, too, that I was a great friend of Mrs. Price, which was another complete mistake. You see one cannot depend upon any of them."

"M. Dalange," replied John, "only wished to find out whether Macdonald was playing him true or false as to the persons from whom he professed to get his information. With regard to the note you mention, I can tell you how Mrs. Temple got it. It was through the people who took Stonecliff. Mrs. Price pressed an acquaintance with them, as I understand, and they, coming into a new neighbourhood, and not knowing anything about the residents, let her make up to them; and so, by degrees, as they grew more intimate, I suppose, they talked about Mrs. Temple, and Mrs. Weir, and all the family, and Mrs. Price put them up to her notion of what was going on, and through them alarmed Mrs. Temple, *who, I* believe, is a distant relation. The object of it all, of *course*, was to have you recalled."

"I suppose it must have been so," I said; "but what motive could Mrs. Price have had to interfere at all in the matter?"

"First of all, she hates you as much as she hates any one on the face of the earth," said John. "You have kept aloof from her, and made other people do the same; and she has never forgiven Jessie's marrying into your family; and if she could do you an injury and make Roger and Jessie miserable, she would be only too glad. But besides this, I pretty well know that her husband was in a certain degree mixed up with Macdonald's speculation, and it was a matter of importance to her, therefore, to get hold of Miss Milicent's money, which as long as you were there to watch, could not be done. But all this, Ursie, is comparatively nothing; I must again go back to the fact of the accusation against your sister-in-law, and say that it ought to be contradicted at once if it is untrue; and if it is not, the sooner it is crushed the better.

"It is not true," I again said.

"Well! then, some one must get a direct acknowledgment that it is false from Macdonald himself. Now, Ursie, if you think I might venture, I believe I could do so, and this very day. Macdonald leaves Dene to-morrow."

"I don't know," I said. "To interfere without Roger's consent! I don't quite see how it could be done."

"I was in hopes," he said, "that it might be the easiest way. I have Macdonald under my thumb, and, in his sober senses, he knows that full well. I could without difficulty bring him before a court of justice for being mixed up with the Frenchman's frauds. Anything that I insist upon his doing he will do, when he is sober, that is. And I am now going to Dene with the full determination of making him sign a paper retracting every word he had the audacity to utter against you and me last night. If you were quite sure, quite certain that the accusation against your sister-in-law is as unfounded as that brought against us, I could easily force him to retract it at the same time."

If! In spite of Jessie's protestations and Roger's happi-

ness, and the absence of anything that could be called proof to the contrary, I hesitated; and John perceived my hesitation, I am sure, but he could not bear to notice it. Neither could I bear to allude to it.

"I think," I said, after a few moments' consideration, "that you may very fairly tax him with exaggeration, and with having implied that his intelligence came direct from Jessie, when in fact he only learnt it through Mrs. Price. More than this I am afraid we cannot demand, for Jessie was incautious, and the letter to Mrs. Price ought not to have been written at all."

"It will be a great deal if we get that," said John. "Ursie, if you can only stop the acquaintance with Mrs. Price, you will do a kinder act both towards Roger and Jessie than you at all imagine."

I made no answer, for I felt very desponding.

"You are displeased with me, I am afraid," he continued. "I am interfering."

His tone woke me up from a kind of dream. We were leaving facts; and feelings were dangerous ground.

Speaking quickly, and rather coldly, I said, "Oh! no, indeed. You are very good to take so much trouble. I am sure Roger and we all shall be extremely obliged to you."

It went like an arrow through me to see the pained expression of his face. He took up his hat, wished me good-bye, and did not even say that I should hear from him.

As the door closed behind him, my impulse was to rush after him, to beg him to return, to tell him that I thought him the best, kindest, truest of friends; that I trusted him as I had never trusted any one except Roger; that if I could only see him happy I would be contented to be unhappy myself for the remainder of my life. But marry him! No, I had not come to that yet.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

Roger came to me at the school, and walked with me to church. He was not so comfortable as when I left him in the morning. Jessie, he said, was so extremely depressed; she seemed to take so very much to heart the having been spoken of in that public manner, even by a person whom every one despised. "And I am afraid," he added, "that a few words of mine may have increased her unhappiness. Poor little thing! she is so timid; and you know, Ursie, I have not been accustomed to deal with women of a timid mind, and what I feel I express strongly. I left her at last very miserable, because of something I said about the trust I had always hitherto placed in her, and the full confidence I had in her word; and she seemed to fancy that it implied some change now. I should scarcely have made up my mind to go away from her, only she put herself into a perfect agony about my missing church."

"It certainly must be very strange to you," I said, not quite knowing what other remark to make. "You have had so very little to do with women."

"Nothing, nothing at all, so to say; for I always felt, Trot, that you stood upon your own ground, and did not want petting and humouring. Lately, I have thought," — and he paused, — "I don't know that I have been quite wise with Jessie; she has been such a child to me always."

"Perhaps," I said gently, for I was not sure that he would be pleased to find me agreeing with him, "it might have been better to put her in a more decided position of authority, and to have given her more responsibilities. But then, to be sure, that has been tried since I have been away."

"Not exactly," he said, in a quick tone; "she might have done better, probably she would, if you had not been expected home every day, as it were. But matters of business were put off, — and — I suppose it is natural — she likes going out. *Young things* always do; don't they?"

I could almost have laughed, — it was a simplicity with which one would have been really inclined to find fault, but that it arose from an intense humility. He did literally feel quite ignorant about women, and was in a constant dread of being hard or exacting with his young wife.

"Dear Roger," I said, "you must really cease to look upon Jessie as a young thing, as you call her. When a woman marries, she takes upon herself certain responsibilities; and, whatever her youth may be, she can't shake them off. And, you will not mind my saying that Jessie would be much happier in the end by being made to fulfil her duties than by being assisted in the endeavour to avoid them. And if," I added, "my being at Sandcombe in any way stands in the way of this, I needn't say to you, that, let it be what pain it may to part, I shall be the first to propose it."

"No, Ursie, never, never," he exclaimed eagerly; "it is your home always. But you are right; yes, you are right; I do believe, in other ways, I have been a fool. I don't blame her, poor darling! she was a child; I could not have expected more."

He became very silent after this. We were drawing near the church, and with his usual feeling of reverence, he was doubtless preparing himself to enter rightly upon the service. As I knelt by him, I heard the words of the confession repeated, oh! so fervently, with such deep, deep humiliation. I felt that he was crowding into it all the errors of which he felt himself to have been guilty in his conduct towards Jessie. If there was one prayer on my lips uttered that afternoon more earnestly than any other, it was that God would give to them both the "peace which the world cannot give; that their hearts might be set to obey His commandments, and their time be passed in rest and quietness."

When that prayer was made, I was comforted by the feeling that any unkind jealousy I might once have felt was melting away under the influence of true and unselfish affection.

It was growing dusk before we left the church, for we had

a christening and a long sermon, and the days were short. As we walked back, I told Roger what had passed between John Hervey and me; and he agreed that it might be better for John to interfere in the matter than for him. He could scarcely do it, he said, without making what, perhaps, would be an unwise fuss; and he had no such hold over Mr. Macdonald as John possessed. We referred also to the conversation just before church. Roger was an energetic person in dealing with himself. He never, like some people, sat looking at a fault, and thinking that by looking he was destroying it. The moment he perceived anything to be amiss, he steadfastly set himself to subdue it; and now, having begun to perceive that his love for Jessie was more self-indulgent than self-denying, — for that was the root of the matter when the case was examined, — he was determined to correct the evil without delay. He and I talked over many little ways in which we might bring Jessie round to a sense of her true position in the family, working at our object by degrees, for we both felt that it would not do, especially in her present weak state, to make any sudden change. "By and by," said Roger; "if it please God all should go well with her, there will be a claim upon her which no woman can put aside, and so she will naturally learn to be more managing, and exercise greater authority. I only hope, Ursie, she won't come in your way."

"There is not much fear of that," I said. "I can mark out certain duties which ought to belong especially to me, and those I can attend to; and you know, Roger, it is the principle we want from Jessie, more than the actual work. When she has a baby to attend to, she won't be able to do so much in other ways, but as long as she feels herself responsible, it will not signify. You mustn't quarrel with me," I added, "if sometimes I let things go wrong, just to show her that if she does not attend to them nobody else will. It seems to me rather spoiling a person, whether it may be Jessie or any one else, always to finish what is left undone. There are so many who are *quite satisfied* to see duties performed without troub-

bling themselves to ask who does them. As I once heard Farmer Kemp say, 'One third of the world takes two-thirds of the world's duties, and the other two-thirds share the remainder between them, and so the work is done, and every one thinks he has had his right share.'"

Roger laughed a little, and said the Farmer was always severe upon idlers, but no doubt he was right; adding, "I can't think, however, that there is any lack of will for work in my Jessie."

I agreed with him in a certain way, but I did not enter into what I felt to be the essential difference between Jessie's view of life and mine. With me work was the object, and amusement the accident of existence; with her, amusement was the object, and work the accident. Roger would quite have agreed with me, but he would not have been pleased to be told that his wife differed. He was feeling very tenderly towards her, having discovered, as he supposed, in his own wrong management, the cause of all which of late had disturbed him; and in his noble unselfishness, being thankful to take the whole burden of blame upon himself, so that he might but spare her.

Roger and I entered the house together. I went into the parlour to warm myself, and have a little chat with William; and Roger, finding Jessie not there, ran upstairs to her. I was afraid she was not so well, for William said she had kept to her room all the afternoon. We had said but a few words when Roger came down again. "Jessie must be in the kitchen," he observed, "she is not up stairs."

"She was not there a minute ago," I replied, "for I looked in as I went by; but she may be in the scullery, or perhaps in the dairy."

"She ought to keep quiet," said Roger, anxiously. "I must have her in directly;" and he hurried away.

We heard him call, and speak to the servants, and go out into the back yard; and then he came back again. "She is *not out*," he said; "she must be up stairs;" and now feeling *a little* fidgety myself, I followed him, and we went from

room to room, but no Jessie was to be found. Roger grew very pale, very quiet, instead of rushing from one place to another, as he had done at first, he slowly opened every door, every closet, asked each of the servants separately where their mistress had last been seen, and then put on his hat and went out again. I dared not ask him what he thought, and I returned to the parlour.

"She is taking a little fresh air," said William, as he sat comfortably by the parlour fire, not in the least disturbing himself. "I never trouble myself about these matters, they are sure to come right."

"Jessie is not so very fond of fresh air," I said; "all to-day she has been feeling so unwell."

"All the more reason that she should want air," he replied. "Now, I remember, I did hear the front door close, soon after Roger went to Church. I thought he might have come back for something, but I dare say it was Jessie."

"She ought to be returned then by this time," I said; "hark! what is that?"

It was Roger's voice calling in the garden, clear and full, but sharpened by intense anxiety.

"I must go out to him," I said; "I can't bear this." And I hurried out and joined him in the yard by the great barn.

"She is not here; she must have heard me if she had been," he said. "Oh! Ursie," and he put his hands to his forehead, and actually staggered against the wall, "what does it mean?"

"She is ill, or she has taken some strange fancy in her head," I said. "Are you sure, Roger, that she was not frightened at anything when you left her?"

"Yes," he exclaimed. "She was frightened at me, — at me, who loved her better than life. Ursie, I don't know what I said to her, but she cried, — poor child! poor darling! God forgive me."

"She is gone to Dene," I said. The words came out without thought, and they were scarcely uttered when Roger

was to be seen in the dim twilight, tearing up the lane like a madman.

It was in vain to follow him, I could not go back to William, and I went up stairs to my own room. There sitting down, I strove to bring before my mind all which I dreaded.

But I could not steadily face anything. One fear after another crowded upon me, all connected with Jessie's insincerity and Mrs. Price's fatal influence. I felt certain Jessie was gone to Dene; but ill, weak, alone, in Roger's absence — there must be some very strong motive to lead her to such a step; she must at least have reckoned upon doing it secretly.

There was deception, and Roger must know it. His delusion would be at an end; and where then would be his happiness? My heart grew faint.

I remained by myself, praying, thinking, fearing, listening, and at last, remembering William, roused myself to the effort of going down stairs again. I was glad I did, for William himself was by this time as anxious as I could be, and showing his anxiety by giving the most contradictory and senseless orders. Every corner and nook had been searched, both in the house and out of it, but he insisted upon the servants going round again, and was quite angry with me because I did not accompany them. I could have done so willingly for the sake of occupation; to sit still was unendurable, but my comfort was to dress myself in a cloak, go to the front door, and hearken, catching the hoarse murmur of the sea, and the moaning of the wind rushing across the downs, and thinking, as the sounds mingled with the nervous ringing in my ears, that I heard voices calling out that she was returned.

Seven o'clock came. Roger might have been to Dene and come back; at any rate, it could not be long before he was with us. Whenever I went into the parlour, William sent me to listen again, and at last followed himself; and we stood *together* at the housedoor in silence.

William spoke first. There had been a sudden gust of wind followed by a lull. "A cry, Ursie; you heard it?"

"No," I said; "it was the wind." I left him, and went forward a few paces, hearing nothing."

"There it is again!" called out William. But still all was silent to my ear.

William himself, when I went back to him, thought he had been deceived. I begged him to go in doors, for it was bitterly cold, and rather reluctantly he consented, and was just turning away, when both of us at the same moment exclaimed, "Yes, there is some one." And William called again, whilst I ran into the house to tell Joe Goodenough to take a lantern, and go out.

"It is John Hervey's voice," said William, when I rejoined him; and my heart sank. I thought it must surely have been Roger with Jessie. Whoever it might be, the time seemed endless before Joe had lighted his lantern, and gone forth; and then I thought he moved as though his feet were clogged. "Give me the light; let me take it, and you follow," I exclaimed, throwing my cloak over my head; and the man did as I bade, striding after me as I ran up the lane. When we were at the top, and on the open down, I told my companion to shout, and his call was immediately answered. The voice came from the right, in the direction of Dene; and I went on, till I reached the green path cut in the side of the down, and then ran down as hard as I could. I saw no one; but, before I had gone about a couple of hundred yards, a voice from amidst the furze and fern which clothed the steep descent at the side of the path, called out, "Holloa! who's there? Stay, will you, and lend a helping hand."

"Mr. Hervey!" I exclaimed.

"Ursie!" was uttered almost at the same moment.

"Where are you? What do you want?" I inquired.

"Are you alone? Hold the light this way." And doing as I was bid, whilst bending forward to peer into the darkness, I saw John Hervey, with something in his arms, struggling to make his way up the ascent.

Joe was by his side before I could tell what was to be done; and John Hervey called out in a cheerful voice, "We shall do now, — all right. She will come to herself again presently."

"What! Jessie?"

He made no answer, for he was breathless; but having such good help, in a few moments he was at the top of the bank, with his motionless burden.

"She is dead!" I exclaimed in horror, as I put the lantern to her face.

"Not at all that, ma'am," said Joe; "she is only in a kind of faint. We'll soon have her home;" and, with John's assistance, he raised her again, so as to carry her more conveniently between them, and they went on. I asked no questions, for I felt it was not the moment.

She was taken into the house, carried up to her room, and laid upon the bed. No doubt she had fainted, but it was a worse state of faintness than usual. She revived for a few moments, but only to die away, as it were, again. John and William stayed outside the door. I saw they were both extremely uneasy. I heard William asking questions, but I could not attend to the answers; all my thoughts were given to Jessie. After a few minutes I made up my mind to send into Hove for a doctor. It might not be necessary, but at any rate it was safe, and Joe was ordered to ride off directly. John Hervey said he would go out and look for Roger, who most likely was out upon the downs. I wanted to get Jessie regularly into bed before Roger came; I felt he would be less frightened then. But before I could manage this, a hasty step on the stairs, and a quick but very gentle knock, told that Roger was returned. I opened the door, and, without speaking to me, he went up directly to the bed, and stood looking at his wife for some moments. "She is better now," I said; "we will get her into bed; and I have sent for the doctor from Hove. You had better go down, and leave her *to me.*" Still he did not answer; but he bent down, and *kissed* Jessie's poor, little, pale face, and parted her hair

from her forehead, and lifted her in his arms, that I might unfasten her dress; and I heard him whisper, "Jessie, my Jessie, just smile once." But though she opened her eyes, it was not as though she knew him, and they were immediately closed again.

I told Roger to go down stairs, and said I would call him again when I was ready.

He moved away, but it was only to go outside the door and pace up and down the passage.

Martha and I undressed Jessie, and put her into bed, but she never spoke or looked at us in any way as though she was conscious, only she moaned a good deal, and I began to fear that she must have met with some bad accident, although there were no broken limbs.

"We will make the room comfortable, and then leave your master to watch her," I said to Martha, and I began putting away the things, and sent Martha to fetch some more water. Roger came into the room as Martha went out. He sat down by the bed, and I came and stood by him with Jessie's dress in my hand. The pocket was heavy, and I took the things out of it and laid them on the bed, one by one; her thimble, and a little pocket-book, and needlecase, and pincushion, and, at last, a packet of letters, some of which fell to the ground. Roger picked them up; something made me look at him just then; one letter was in his hand; he was holding it to the light. The expression of his face I shall never forget. I can't describe it; I don't know what it said, but it was so ghastly, — so terrible, that I uttered a faint scream, and caught the letter from him.

The address was, "Lieutenant Macdonald, Dene." The writing was Jessie's.

I examined the others; they were all alike. There must have been at least a dozen.

Roger and I looked at each other, but we said not a word. I referred to the post-mark, it was nearly illegible. "They must be old ones," I said. "Won't you look?"

Without answering, he collected all the letters together,

went to his writing-desk, took out a sheet of paper, and carefully folded them within it, sealed the packet, and directed it, whilst I stood by him, and then put it in his pocket. The address was "For Jessie Grant; from her husband."

He did not look at Jessie again, but left the room.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

About ten o'clock Joe Goodenough returned with the doctor. I went to tell Roger of it. He was in a little spare room close by mine. He came out directly. I did not notice any alteration of manner greater than the circumstances of Jessie's illness would account for easily. We were both present when John Hervey told the story of where he had found her, lying senseless at the bottom of the steep bank. He supposed she must have missed her footing in the dusk, and fallen. William made the awkward remark that he could not see what business she had there, and inquired of Roger whether she had been at Dene.

"Yes," was the short reply, and the tone was such as to silence even William.

Roger did not go up stairs with us, but when the doctor had seen Jessie he waited for him in the passage, and I heard him ask Mr. Harrison what he thought.

"She has had a bad accident," was the answer; "you must take great care of her; especially if there should be symptoms of fever. I will come over again to-morrow."

This was all we could get from him. There was no intimation whether we had anything to fear.

William remarked when Mr. Harrison was gone that Roger took it very quietly. John Hervey came up to me, and said; "Ursie, can you let me tell you what I have done?"

We went together into the large parlour. I sat down, prepared to hear what was painful. John began nervously; "*I am troubling you, Ursie; I would not do it now, but it may be of consequence.* See," and he drew a paper from his

pocket; "Macdonald has retracted every word about you and me, he won't retract about Jessie."

"Let it go," I exclaimed. "Mr. Hervey, it is very miserable."

"Very," he said kindly, but with a certain shyness of manner, as he added, "You won't mind my saying I feel for you."

I wanted comfort so very, very much; I felt as though I must have it at all risks, and I held out my hand to him, and answered; "Oh! Mr. Hervey, you have always helped us in other troubles, but you can't help us in this."

It seemed that he was afraid to accept my friendliness, and he rather drew back, and said, "Her accident may be a blessing; it will keep her quiet, and the gossip may blow over."

"But it won't set all right with Roger," I exclaimed; "and that is all I care for."

"All?" he said, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes!" I repeated, "all. There is nothing to be said of Jessie which any one but Roger has a right to take notice of."

And then, as the words escaped my lips, the remembrance of the packet of letters flashed across me, and a sudden feeling of faint terror came over me, which made me lean back in my chair, and put my hand up to my head.

John did not appear to see what I was suffering. I am sure he was keeping a strict guard over himself, and so indeed was I now. His cautiousness made me ashamed of the feeling which I had for one moment expressed. He asked me what was to be said to Roger. I had not thought of this before, and it was a serious difficulty. I longed to escape the task, but it was cowardly, and I said, "Leave it to me, and I will manage it;" then I stood up to show that the interview was over, and John wished me "good night," and we parted.

I was standing by Jessie's bed, as I heard the farm-yard gate close, and knew that he was gone. I did not understand before how dreary my heart could be without him.

The opportunity for mentioning the result of John Hervey's interview with Mr. Macdonald was not given me, as Roger

must have guessed it, without being told; he never exchanged one word with me upon that subject or the letters, and of course I could not introduce the matter.

No mother could have been more thoughtful, tender, helpful, than he was in the long weeks of nursing which followed Jessie's accident. He sat up at night, gave her all her medicine, moved her pillows, watched her, whenever he was able to give up his time to her, with an unremitting attention; but the ghastly look of wretchedness never left his face, and, by degrees, I saw it settle into a fixed impress, which set wrinkles in his forehead, and marked dark lines about his mouth, so that persons who saw him only for a moment were heard to say, "Roger Grant's anxiety for his wife is breaking his heart."

There was cause for anxiety, independent of any secret grief. Jessie was more ill than any person I had ever up to that time seen, who was not very near death. She knew us all, especially Roger; but I think she scarcely had a clear recollection of anything which had passed immediately before her accident. At any rate she was too weak to allude to it. She was hovering between life and death, and the doctor said that the birth of her child would, certainly, according to all human calculation, determine the point. In the meantime the slightest agitation would be fatal. Every one was very kind to me. Mrs. Kemp and Mary came over to see me frequently. Mary's marriage was to take place sooner than had been anticipated, and though they were, in consequence, very busy, they always found time to spare for me. I made Mrs. Kemp tell me all she heard. I thought it was right to know what kind of impression had gone abroad respecting Jessie's accident. Some remarks I was sure would be made, from the stories repeated by the servants. Mrs. Kemp told me she had heard all kinds of contradictory things. Some quite absurd, such as that Jessie and Roger had quarrelled, and she had run away from him, and had gone to take refuge with Mrs. Price. The fact that she had been at Dene that *Sunday* afternoon was undeniable, for the servants had ad-

mitted her into the house, and said she looked scared and wild, so that they were quite frightened to see her. There was another corroboration of that circumstance, which I knew only too well. No doubt excited and distressed by Roger's expressions of confidence, knowing that at the time of her marriage she had deceived him, and that her letters could at any moment be produced against her, — she must have felt that at all risks they were to be obtained and destroyed.

This was a probable reason for her conduct, but was it all?

John Hervey came to see us much more frequently. He was still just as constrained in manner, but his was such a kind heart, that at any sacrifice to himself he would have done whatever he thought might add to another's comfort. And there were many things in which he was now of the greatest use — giving Roger help in matters connected with the farm, and undertaking business for him which might lie at a distance. Nothing was a trouble to him, and many times my heart smote me as I felt what use I made of him, and yet what a poor return I could offer him. Thanks, only thanks and gratitude; so I said to myself still; and I thought I was sufficiently careful over my words and actions, and never showed how much I rested upon him, lest my manner should be misinterpreted. I think there was something of pride within me, which forbade me to acknowledge to myself that he was becoming at all dearer to me. He was so unlike my ideal of what I could love; so different from Roger; so much more approachable; and resembling every one else! And then I had often made up my mind that it would be quite impossible for me to love any one as well as I once loved Roger, and anything short of that would be unsatisfactory. I had long set myself down as a confirmed old maid, and I did not choose this notion of myself to be disturbed. It was all very well in theory; quite natural and necessary, so it seemed to me; but I had left out one most important item in my calculations — the knowledge of John Hervey's love. I did not think about it; I even tried to put it entirely aside; but whenever in moments of dreariness I looked round the world for

comfort, and amongst all my friends and relations found none, not even Roger to love me best, I turned uneasily to the true, honest, devoted heart, which one word or look might, as I knew, make my own possession for ever; and the thought of being the wife of John Hervey no longer struck me as an impossibility.

But I am wandering on too far. Those feelings were of slow growth, and very secretly developed in my own sight; and as day by day went on, each brought its burden to occupy my mind; whilst Roger's face was alone sufficient to make me feel as though it were a sin even for a moment to dream of future happiness. I heard often from Miss Milicent, and the accounts were upon the whole satisfactory. She enjoyed the travelling, and was learning, as she said, to put up with Mrs. Temple. But there was no feeling which would enable them to live together for a continuance; and in every letter Miss Milicent reverted to the hope I had held out of being able at last to establish herself in a home of her own at Compton.

"I have a thought, Ursie," she wrote to me, in a letter dated from Dresden, "of settling myself some day at the Heath. I don't know where the money is to come from, for I have not a penny to spare, having just paid two shares of our journey here, because Matilda Temple said it was fair, as she only came for me, that I might see the pictures. I don't care for pictures enough to pay so much for them; but that is no matter — anything to keep the peace; and I don't forget that in former days I spent money to please myself, and so it is not to be wondered at if now I am obliged to do it to please others. But you see, Ursie, I have a double share of hope to what some people have; and so I believe that somehow the way will turn up for what I wish. In the mean time, I satisfy myself by thinking about it; and if it does not come at last, why no doubt there will be something else in its stead. I am obliged to think in this way, or Matilda Temple's doings would drive me daft."

The Heath would be a very pleasant home for Miss Mili-*cent.* I already fancied I saw her established there; but the

like myself, had probably an ordeal to pass before rest could be attained.

And what did Jessie feel all this time? That was a question which I put to myself many times, but to which I never found an answer. I think her weakness and the feeling of illness must have been such, that she could scarcely have collected her ideas sufficiently to think, in any strict sense of the word; otherwise she could scarcely have borne Roger's presence; still less have endured his waiting upon her with that quiet, sad thoughtfulness, which made me wretched whenever I saw him approach her. She went through the forms of religion. Roger read a little to her every day, and prayed with her; and Mr. Richardson came very frequently, and once proposed to administer the Holy Communion; but she seemed to shrink from this, and no one ventured to press it upon her; the doctor had given such strict injunctions about keeping her from anything that might agitate her. It was a relief to Roger, as I fancied, to have it delayed; and so it was to me in a certain way. If she was not conscious, and penitent, it would have been such a mockery; and yet it was very terrible to see her gliding on, as one might say, to what might too probably be death; and never to be allowed to hint at anything, past or present, which might reveal to us the state of her mind, burdened as we knew it must be. How often I thought then of the warning not to put off repentance to a sick bed. I had heard it so many times in sermons, but it never touched me in the way it did then.

And with all this great uneasiness about Jessie's state, was mingled so much true affection. I don't speak of Roger. No earthly being, I am sure, could penetrate into the depths of the love which he still felt. His was a heart which might break, but could not change; but for myself, Jessie was to me really a younger sister; her faults did not shock me. I had known them for years. Even their bitter consequences were scarcely a surprise to me, and now, as I saw her lying so helpless and suffering, waiting, like a criminal under sentence of execution, for the hour which might bring death, and a

death for which I could not but fear she was unprepared, every tender feeling of sympathy was increased a hundred-fold, and there were moments when I knelt beside her bed in anguish of spirit, praying that God would yet be merciful to her, and pardon, and spare her.

CHAPTER LXXX.

And so time went on, and we thought we were all ready, and believed that every possibility had been provided against. Some one sat up with her every night. I had taken my turn, and, feeling very much worn out, went to bed, leaving the nurse with Jessie. I must have slept very soundly. I think I had an indistinct consciousness of unusual sounds; but no one came to call me, and, though generally on the alert at the least disturbance, it was dawn before I awoke, and, starting up with a sudden impulse of anxiety, hurried to Jessie's room. The door was ajar. I saw Roger kneeling by the bedside, his eyes fixed upon Jessie's face, stamped with the impress of death. The nurse was standing with her back towards me. As I softly entered, she turned round, and laid in my arms her little burden, — Jessie's baby.

I don't think at the first moment I quite understood what had happened; it seemed all so unexpected, so bewildering. I gave back the baby to the nurse, and went round to Roger, and knelt down by him, and put my arm round him; but he had no look or voice for me. As though by his steadfast gaze he could arrest the hand of death, he remained still in the same posture, with Jessie's hand clasped in his, his face as pale, his form as motionless as hers. I beckoned to the nurse to give me the infant again, and asked what had been done about the doctor.

"He must be here directly," was the reply; "he was sent for, but he must have been out elsewhere."

"Can nothing be done?" I asked.

The nurse shook her head.

"Have you no hope?"

She drew me aside, that Roger might not hear, and whispered, "None."

I sat down by the fire. Martha was in the room also. She offered to take the baby from me. But I would not part with it. A new, clinging affection had, in a moment, sprung up within me; it seemed all that was left to give me comfort.

The doctor came. He spoke to the nurse and to Roger. I sat apart and watched whilst he inquired into Jessie's state. I think I was the first person who saw the expression in his countenance, which told that he did not despair, and I uncovered the face of my little treasure, and pressed a kiss upon its velvet forehead, whilst I whispered a prayer of unutterable thankfulness. As I glanced at Roger, I saw that his hope was not like mine; he had too much depending upon the issue.

Jessie's life hung upon a thread. We had known that for many weeks; but the fact had never been present to us as it was during the few days which followed the birth of her child. It was a suspense continued without interruption from hour to hour, for there were no seasons of rallying, or of any visible improvement; only one stagnant condition, if one may so call it, about which the utmost that could be said was, that it was not entirely devoid of hope. And during this time, the care of the child, making arrangements for a nurse, watching over it, even loving it, seemed to be left entirely to me. I think that to Roger it must have seemed the herald of its mother's death; for when the nurse once forced him to take it in his arms, and said he might be proud of his little daughter, who would no doubt grow up to be a comfort to him, he kissed it fondly, and then put it from him, as though he could not bear to look at it.

After the first week, the doctor spoke more cheeringly, and told us that the worst was over. The news brought joy to every heart at Sandcombe, except, as it seemed, to Roger's. Relieved he was, and thankful; but there was a deepening gloom on his brow which no effort could shake off, and I saw that by degrees he kept away from Jessie's room, except when some *one else* was there; whilst, whenever the remark as to

the child's likeness to its mother was made before him, he turned it off with a laugh which actually grated upon my ear. I longed to make him talk to me; I felt that perhaps together we might extract some comfort from the facts which we both knew, and sometimes I thought whether he would not be justified, under the circumstances, in opening the letters, and satisfying himself as to the extent of the deception which had been practised upon him. But that was not like Roger. With his power of self-control, his strength of will and endurance, he would have borne the torture of the drop of water falling upon his head moment by moment, and never by the slightest impulse of impatience have striven to hasten the hour appointed for the cessation of his agony.

The only comfort I had was that I believed I thoroughly understood him, and knew exactly what he feared. To have been deceived — that was his bitterness; and if Jessie had laid herself open to the worst condemnation of the world, the heart of a man like Roger could scarcely have been more utterly crushed.

That particular time was more distressing to me than any which went before it. In great danger there is great excitement. There was none now. The future lay before me chill and blank both for Roger and myself, for if he was miserable how could I be happy? The explanation with Jessie, which at a distance I had sometimes fancied might succeed in restoring confidence, must, I felt, as we approached it, end wretchedly; and as Jessie gradually regained her strength, I had a cowardly feeling of relief each day that the subject was delayed, and yet a longing, at times almost uncontrollable, to rush into it at once, and hear and know the worst.

So I think it must have been with Jessie likewise. Yet I could not tell whether she was summoning courage to speak to Roger, or whether indeed she perfectly remembered all that had happened before her illness. Her reserve was most painful, and sometimes I thought it was becoming a fixed habit of mind which would end in complete depression. Her baby was the only thing she seemed to live for; for her fear of

Roger was evident. At times I could have been almost jealous of her claim upon the child. It was the first baby that had been given to us as a family, and many probably will understand how great is the feeling which such circumstances may create. Every night before we went to bed William made me take him to the cradle, that he might kiss the little thing as it lay asleep; and most touching it was to observe the softening of his rough features, and the lowering of his voice, as he bent over, straining his darkened eyes to catch just the outline of its little form. For myself it was Roger's child, and when I held it in my arms and felt its tiny fingers helplessly clasping mine, a thrill of unspeakable tenderness passed over me, which, though it could not have been a mother's love, must have been something very nearly approaching to it.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

Jessie had been out for the first time, wrapped in the white shawl, Mrs. Weir's wedding-gift; the day was deliciously warm for the season, and Roger had procured a little hand-carriage for her, that she might be drawn up and down the garden. William, Roger, and I were with her.

I had the baby in my arms as usual. We were standing round Jessie, and I was feeling painfully that I was making an effort to enjoy the brightness. William had lately become quite a relief to us; he was some one to be attended to, his spirits were improved, and he was interested in things not connected with us, and so gave us other subjects of conversation than those on which our thoughts were dwelling.

Jessie did not speak at all, — Roger very little; the conversation was kept up between William and me.

"When is Mary Kemp's wedding to come off, Ursie?" he asked.

"This day three weeks," I replied, "and she has asked me to be bridesmaid. I should like it, only, really, I cannot afford a new dress."

"Why *you must* have that which you wore at Jessie's wed-

ding," said William. "I am sure you have not been gay enough since to spoil it. Or if you want anything very smart, and likely to be cheap, I advise you to go and try for some of Mrs. Price's gowns. I did not tell you, Roger, the news which Joe Goodenough brought in just now, — that the Prices have all gone smash, and everything they have is to be sold."

Jessie uttered an exclamation of distress. Roger said very quietly, "Indeed!" and stood further aloof from Jessie.

"Oh! William," I observed reproachfully, as I saw that Jessie was much upset, "you shouldn't have told it so abruptly."

"Why not?" he replied; "Jessie is not such a goose as really to care for those people, and all the world have known what must come. Macdonald is in for it, too; so they will be all out of the country soon, and there will be no more gossip, which will be one comfort for you, Jessie, my dear. Your friends would have got you into a scrape if they could. By the bye, Ursie," he added, "I never quite understood whether John Hervey made Macdonald retract what he said that night at Hove. I remember I asked, and you only gave me a kind of blundering answer."

Roger turned round shortly, "Jessie has been out long enough; it is time she should go in."

"Would you like it, dear?" I asked, as I arranged the cushion for her at the back of her chair.

"She had better go in," repeated Roger. The tone of his voice struck William.

"Why your husband is growing quite fierce, Jessie," he said, "I would not let him be such a tyrant."

Jessie trembled all over, — she tried to speak, but I could not hear her words.

"I have not had my question answered yet," said William, in a persisting tone. "If John Hervey has not got Macdonald's *written* words, Roger ought to insist upon them himself; only *he is such* a tame-spirited fellow."

I saw Roger start, and a storm of indignation crossed his face. The expression was still there, when he drew near Jessie and said, "I shall take you in." She looked up at him, — she kept her eyes fixed upon him. It was as though she were paralysed by fear. I feared also, — yet Roger's momentary excitement was quite subdued.

"I will tell you about it another time," I said to William. "Just now I must go with Jessie." Something was wrong, William saw then; he asked nothing more. Jessie made me walk by her side; when we went into the house, and Roger lifted her out of the chair, she still clung to me; but I had the child in my arms, and was not able to support her. After attempting to mount the stairs in vain, Roger took her in his arms, and carried her to her room. Then he left us together.

Jessie lay on the sofa. I put the baby into the cradle, and asked if I could get anything for her. She refused; it was not being tired, she said, — she did not want anything; but the trembling agitation increased.

"You must see Roger," I said, at length, and I looked at her steadily. I think she must have understood me, for she put her hand across her forehead, as if to clear her thoughts.

Some one knocked at the door. It was Roger; I did not dare look at him. He put into my hand a note and the packet of letters, and went away, and I returned back to Jessie. She had recognised his step. I heard her murmur to herself, as I opened the note, "He won't come to me, — he will leave me, — God help me."

The note was written in pencil, and was scarcely legible. "Give them to her, Ursie. I have never looked at them. I never will. From this hour the subject shall never be mentioned to her again."

Jessie watched my face, — she caught the note from me and read it twice. As she gazed at me in bewilderment, I put the packet into her hands. She broke the seal.

The expression of her countenance was not fear or sorrow, but a *cold, calm* despair.

"You see," I said, bitterly; "there is nothing to fear, — he has not read them."

Without replying, she rose from the sofa as if a new impulse of strength had been given her, and moved towards the door.

"You will not find him," I said, and I tried to prevent her from going out. She sat down again quite still, — upright.

The baby began to cry, but she took no notice; her face was quite stony. I felt frightened, and thought I would rouse her. "Shall I put them away for you?" I said, taking up the letters.

Her only answer was, "Let me go to him."

"No," I said, "he will come to you, if you wish to see him — shall I call him?"

She did nothing to stop me, and I went down-stairs. Roger was waiting below. I motioned to him to follow me. When he stood at the threshold of Jessie's room I drew back.

"No," he said, quietly. "Ursie, I have no secrets," and he went in after me, and stood waiting for Jessie to speak.

It was like a dreadful dream to me. I looked from one to the other, — but there was no hope or comfort in either face.

Twice Jessie tried to speak, and each time her voice was stopped.

"Roger," I said at length, "she has done very wrong, but she will acknowledge it."

He pointed to the note. "I have said it — I know nothing."

"Speak to him," I began, turning to Jessie, "tell him" —

But Roger stopped me: "Ursie, I cannot hear, — I wish for no extorted confidence. Jessie, from this moment the past is buried."

The sound of Jessie's own name seemed to break the spell which bound her. She drew near to Roger, and laying the letters before him, said, though without the least softening of the stony expression of misery, "Read them."

He pushed them from him.

"It is just, — right," I exclaimed; "Roger, you must read them."

"They can make no difference," he said, coldly.

Jessie turned to me imploringly.

"He has been deceived, Jessie," I said; "you must forgive him."

Roger moved as if to go, but Jessie caught his arm. "Will you be unjust?" she said.

He took up one of the letters and opened it, but the paper seemed to be burning to his touch.

"Read, Ursie," said Jessie, "read them all, every word; they were written long ago, all except one."

She sat down, hiding her face in her hands.

Roger's eye glanced rapidly over the first letter, — then he proceeded to read the others, slowly, in the manner of a judge receiving evidence. As he read, he handed each letter to me. No one spoke, the baby had ceased crying, and the only sound heard was that of the rustling paper; and still Jessie never looked up, as we sat before her, perusing these evidences of her folly and deceit.

They were letters written to Mr. Macdonald, after the time when I had fully understood, from what she told me, that she had refused him; and they were carried down to within one week of her acceptance of Roger. They were childish and foolish, complaining of the interference of her friends, and the hardness of her fate; and although there was no open declaration of her feeling for Mr. Macdonald, there was certainly enough in them to make any man suppose that she was much attached to him. Besides these there was one short note, written after her marriage, begging him to return the letters.

The last letter was read by Roger and laid upon the table. I ventured then to glance at him. His countenance was unaltered, except for its ashy paleness, and the look of his eye, which made me tremble. I gathered the letters together, and mechanically said, "Thank you, dear," and then I stopped down and kissed Jessie. Indeed, I pitied her so much, I

could not do otherwise. She turned aside from me, and slowly rising, went and stood before Roger.

"I have deceived you," she said firmly, "but not as you think. You asked me if I could give you my full, free affection, and I said 'Yes.' It was true; true then, as it is now, true in the sight of God. Roger, I have never loved any one but you; but, oh! Ursie," and she turned to me, and leaning her head upon my shoulder, sobbed convulsively, "you warned me, and I would not listen. I did not care for Mr. Macdonald, but I liked having his letters, and writing, and flirting; so I would not say entirely 'No;' or at least, though I did say it, I still let him believe I was not in earnest. Things went on much farther than I ever intended. Only when Roger asked me to marry him, my eyes seemed to open; I had never thought it could be, it seemed too great happiness. I told him I was wicked, and that I should disappoint him. I could not say anything else. I thought if I confessed to him what I had done, and if he were to see the letters, he would suppose I cared for Mr. Macdonald, — and I did not really. I was afraid it would turn his heart from me, and so I said nothing about them. When I was married, I thought Mr. Macdonald would destroy the letters, and everything would be forgotten. He promised me he would; he wrote me a note saying so. Ursie, you will remember my having it. Mrs. Price gave it to me when we were together in Hove. But he was false to me, he kept them, and I think — I am nearly sure — Mrs. Price made him do it. She talked to me about them, and frightened, and made me miserable; and I could never get them back. Sometimes they were promised me, but they were never given. Oh! it has been so wretched! so wretched! They both forced me to do whatever they liked, for they said that at any moment they could make Roger hate me. When you were away, Ursie, they were always forming plans for me to meet them and be with them, and requiring me to tell everything I knew about you, and what you were doing in France. I knew I *ought not*, but I dared not refuse. I felt as though I was a *spy* upon you, but I could not draw back. At last, — I don't

know how I did it, — I was nearly mad — that night that Roger came from Hove, and the next day — the Sunday — it seems all misty, but I got the letters. I think Mr. Hervey had been there and frightened them; I don't know — only —" her voice became forced and hollow — "I told them I would never return to my home without them; and it was true, I would have died first."

She paused, faint and breathless.

"Confession was all that was required, from the beginning, dear Jessie," I said.

"And I would have confessed," she said, sinking into a chair, and clasping my hand, whilst still keeping her eyes fixed upon Roger. "I meant then to have told all; I would have done so now, lately, but, Ursie, I knew he had them. I saw it in his face."

"And the note which I saw in Paris," I said, doubtfully; "was that really not to Mr. Macdonald?"

"Indeed not, indeed it was as I told you; but I equivocated. I was obliged to send messages, and answer questions; he did hear many things from me, though I never wrote, except that one note, which you have seen, — never, that is, since I have been Roger's wife. Oh, Ursie, won't you believe me?"

Poor child! it was impossible not to believe her then. But what wretchedness had vanity and want of moral courage brought upon her.

"Speak to him for me, Ursie," she whispered; "tell him I will go where he likes, he shall never see me again;" and as she said the words, I saw her glance at the cradle and a shudder shook her frame.

I went up to Roger. "She has confessed all," I said; "Roger, it is for you to forgive."

He answered, "I have told her; the past is buried."

"Not buried, but forgiven!" exclaimed Jessie, and she threw herself at his feet; "else let me leave you."

"Buried," repeated Roger. "We are man and wife, and none *can part us.*"

"Roger," I said, "God does not deal so with us."

"Forgiveness means confidence," was his reply.

"I do not ask confidence!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Roger, no! Distrust me, watch me, I will bear it all, all, — everything. I will thank you, and bless you. Only can you never love me again?"

His face expressed agony, yet not relenting. She held him — she clung to him — her look was piteous in its anguish. When still he turned from her she slowly arose, and, going to the cradle, lifted her baby from it, and again kneeling before him, said in a tone of quiet despair, "Roger, I am its mother." I saw him bend down and kiss her; I watched the large tears fall upon the face of his unconscious child, and heard him say, "Jessie, may God forgive us both!" — and then I left them.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

I WALKED that afternoon to St. Anne's Hill. I stood by the tower of the oratory, and gazed over the sea towards the white cliffs, and the dim island in the far distance; and I looked upon the tower of Compton church, and the cottages in the village, and the remains of the ruined abbey; and, as I looked, my thoughts travelled back through my life, and I read it as it had been in the pages of a book. I thought how changed I was since those early years when I had first learnt to love the view from St. Anne's; how then it had been associated with but one interest, and one affection, and how that affection had disappointed me, and the hopes which I had cherished had crumbled into dust. I remembered my own character as it was then, and I saw how, by means of that disappointment, I had been chastened, and trained for higher duties, and truer views of my position in the world.

I thought of Mrs. Weir, her long suffering; her patient saintliness, and the lesson for Eternity which had been taught me through her means. I knew that, as she had said, when *speaking* of herself, I had not had one trial too much, not one

that could have been spared. And then my mind turned to others, and I marked how the same discipline was being carried on with them. I saw, or fancied I saw, how even Roger, with all his goodness and nobleness of disposition, had suffered himself to be blinded by feeling, and how the sorrow had now come upon him, which, with all its mercy, was surely mingled with judgment. I felt that he could never be as he had been; that a new life was to begin for him, and for Jessie; a life full of watchfulness and effort, and self-restraint, and endurance; and as I pondered upon all these things, my heart insensibly became burdened with the sense of an awful reality, a perception of that wonderful fact, that the events of life are in themselves nothing, that they are but the body, destined to decay; yet that each, however trifling, bears within it the seed that is to exist for Eternity; and I felt that I could yield myself passively to any circumstances, whether happy or unhappy, neither wearying myself with regrets for the past, nor burdening myself with cares for the future, so only that the present moment might add its grain of faith and holiness, to the treasure garnered in the Hand of God against the Great Day of Account.

At that moment I had no visions for myself of any happiness in this world which might yet be in store for me. I thought that I had accepted my lot from God, both as regarded myself, and those I loved; and that I did not even wish for change; and in that mood of mind I descended the hill, and wandered on over the down, till I reached the tall column at its extremity, and was close upon the woods of Dene. There I met with John Hervey. He had passed through the grounds, for the place was deserted; Captain Price, his wife, Mr. Macdonald, the servants, were all gone. Everything was given up to satisfy the claims of creditors. John asked me to go with him into the garden, he wished to speak to the man who had charge of it. It did not enter my mind to refuse; what I did seemed unimportant, and I was less watchful and conscious with him than I had been. Perhaps, too, I liked his society; perhaps it was cheering to me. Doubtless,

if I had felt as I did when we parted in France, I should have been less easily persuaded, but I was not thinking of myself at all, and scarcely of him; my thoughts were all with Roger and Jessie.

And so were his, at least in appearance. He made me turn with him, and walk up and down the stone pavement under the verandah, and then he spoke to me openly about all that had lately occurred. He touched upon my own feelings with regard to Roger and Jessie. He put before me all that I had thought, and feared, and all that I had hoped; he seemed to know everything by instinct. He told me that I had given my best affections to Roger, and demanded of him in return more than any brother could give. He said that I had formed my ideas of happiness without regard to the ordinary arrangements of God's Providence, and that in consequence I had had much to bear. He warned me that I must prepare myself to see Roger suffer greatly from disappointment, for that his eyes must open by degrees to Jessie's character; and though she might improve, she could never be the wife whom he might naturally have expected to find. And then he commented, and as I thought severely, upon the facts of Jessie's conduct wich he himself had learnt.

The subjects were such as I could not have imagined myself able to endure from any one, when handled so plainly; and yet I did bear them from John Hervey. He had a way of putting what he said — I think it was from his simple, honest goodness of heart — which made me feel that he would never wilfully misunderstand; and he led me on till — I hope it was no breach of confidence — I found myself telling him at last the scene which had occurred that morning. It seemed only justice to Jessie; his suspicions were likely to go beyond the truth, and I could not bear him to be hard upon her.

He heard what I had to say without interruption; when I had finished, he paused for some moments in thought; then *he said*, "And Roger has forgiven?"

"*Quite*," I replied. "Quite, I believe; I hope so."

"He is a noble fellow," continued John. "Ursie, he is better than I could be."

"And better than I could be," I said.

"Once deceived, always deceived," said John.

And I added, "Yes, where one has loved."

"You are right, where one has loved," he continued. "Forgiveness is an easy matter when the heart is not wounded. So, Ursie, I should be very cautious; I should take a long time before I risked my happiness in marriage. There must have been an intimate knowledge, careful observation, the experience of many circumstances of trial. In a matter of life or death, — and marriage in my eyes is that, and nothing short of it, — there must be no chance of failure."

"Roger thought he was right," I said.

"I don't blame him; it would be very presumptuous. But, Ursie, I could not have done like him."

"I don't think you could," was my reply. "Roger is so trusting."

He paused as though hurt by the remark; then he said, "Trust is either wisdom or folly, according as it is founded upon reason. Let my reason be convinced that I have grounds for trust, and I hope, I know I could give it fully and heartily."

I made no reply. Something in his tone and manner made my heart beat quickly.

He turned to me suddenly. "Don't you believe me, Ursie?"

"Yes, yes; but —"

"But what?"

"No one can be quite certain of what another is; and you will think you have found perfection, — and —"

"Well!"

"There must be faults; marriage must be a lottery."

"No, Ursie, no; not always. Where one has watched, and loved long, and waited patiently, and prayed earnestly — " *he stopped.*

"I trust it may not be a lottery with you," I answered, and my voice trembled.

"It cannot be," he exclaimed, impetuously. "Ursie," he paused, and a deadly paleness overspread his countenance, "say only the word, and it will not be."

I looked in his face and answered, as I laid my hand in his, "If you do not fear, John, how can I?"

And so we were engaged.

I wandered with John Hervey through the grounds of Dene. I listened to the plash of the fountain, the scream of the peacock, the striking of the old clock, and the rustling murmur of the wind amongst the plantations; but I thought not of the joys of my childhood, for the present was bright with the sunshine of an unclouded happiness. I stood with him upon St. Anne's Hill, but I had forgotten my calm acceptance of life, my resignation to its cares, and indifference to its pleasures. The sea sparkled in the glowing sunset, and its glitter seemed the reflection of the gladness of my heart. The breeze floated by me, and bore with it the murmurs of a happiness which could never forsake me. The birds winged their way to their rest, and I thought that my rest had begun; and when I gazed upon the tower of the ruined oratory, and turning to John reproached myself that I could so dwell upon an earthly joy, he answered, "Ursie, the love which God blesses in its birth, can never know death."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

Only when I returned to Sandcombe was my mind brought back to the perception that life is, and always will be, probation.

People speak of forgiveness, as though it must necessarily imply entire forgetfulness. That has always seemed to me a mistake. We may cease to dwell upon an offence, but when it has revealed to us faults which we never suspected — when it has shaken our confidence — forgetfulness is impossible. New feelings may spring up, but the old can never return.

I think Jessie opened her eyes but slowly to that truth, whilst Roger saw it from the beginning. He was at heart a brave man, — morally brave, — except perhaps when called upon to give pain to others; and he allowed himself now in no self-deceit, in a question in which the vital happiness of his life was involved. Jessie had disappointed him. He did not try to hide from himself the fact. He looked at it boldly, — with what bitterness and self-reproach, what deep compassion and sympathy and tenderness, only God can tell, and only one who knew him as I did could imagine. His manner to Jessie was quite altered. It had lost the gentle flattering attention of the lover, and had become the watchful, thoughtful guardianship of the father. Every want was provided for, every necessity foreseen; but the hasty wish was checked, the fancy of extravagance reproved. It was his duty to train her, for he had chosen her untrained. Some of her faults might be called her own, but others were in a manner his, for he had himself placed her in a position for which she was unfitted, and then shrunk from insisting upon its duties. Now the task of instructing her was laid upon him. It struck me much how anxiously and conscientiously he entered upon this duty; with what firmness, and, yet what singular humility and self-distrust, never regretting or upbraiding, always bearing in mind that he had marked out his own lot, and that it was only God's great mercy and kind Providence which had prevented it from being a hundred-fold more bitter.

It was a very different married life from that which those who knew and loved Roger would have anticipated, for Jessie was not changed at once. That is another mistake which we are apt to fall into. We hear of striking events, a great shock of fortune, an alarming illness, some painful tearing aside of the veil of self-deception, and think that because great feeling is aroused, great changes must follow. There may be — there often is — a great change of principle, but the work is carried on according to natural laws. Vanity, wilfulness, selfishness, faults which are the growth of years, it will take *years to subdue.* So it is that the true conversion of the heart

in middle age will yet leave the hard lines of an indulged evil temper strongly and painfully marked. Jessie was willing to bear her discipline. She was humbled and penitent; but the old self still remained, even whilst she struggled against it. My greatest hope of her attaining to strength of character was based upon her anxiety for her child. I remembered what Mrs. Kemp had said about the way it sobers a woman to have little helpless things to take care of; and I thought I could see the beginning of this steadiness and thought even now. In the prospect of my soon leaving her, she was continually talking to me about what was to be done when I was gone, and how she was to manage to bring up her child rightly — to be different from herself; that was her great desire. But I did not entirely share that wish, neither I am sure did Roger. The old romantic love was over, but a new and more lasting appreciation of her good qualities was dawning upon him. Jessie, in her best moods, was very winning, and truly deserving of all the affection that could be bestowed upon her. At this time especially, her unselfishness made me cling to her with a daily increasing affection.

I don't think either she or Roger gave one thought to themselves when they knew I was engaged to John Hervey, though the change came at a time when they could least of all spare me, and when both of them looked to me not only for help but comfort. I was never made to feel, either by look or tone, or even by a sigh, that my happiness was to be purchased at the expense of their daily ease; and yet they gave me all the affection which in my most exacting moments I could demand. It is often said that there is a great deal of ingratitude in the world, and no doubt there is; but I will never believe that if a person really tries to put self second, there is any lack of reward even on earth. I can say with truth that this had been my object, as I can also say with greater truth that I had constantly failed to attain it. Witness the way in which I took Roger's marriage. Now it seemed as though kindness and consideration and sympathy were actually showered upon me. I believe Mrs. Kemp was only one degree less interested for

me than she was for Mary, whose marriage was to take place about a month before mine. The cottage in which John and I were to live was very near Longside, and half Mrs. Kemp's time was spent in arranging about furniture and alterations. She really took all the trouble off my hands. William did what I little expected of him, and certainly could not have asked; he promised to give me five hundred pounds on my wedding-day, and declared he should leave everything he had equally divided between Roger and me. With John's consent I arranged to let Jessie have one hundred out of my five put aside for her at once. The question of her money had been a trouble to me from the beginning; and when both Roger and she objected, and said that William would not like it, John and I determined to have it settled upon the baby. I felt that I must begin my married life with a clear conscience about all such matters. I could not take William's money with the thought that Jessie had any claim upon it. I did not mean to let William know anything about it, but it did come to his ears, and he then said he would make the arrangement himself. This pleased me as much as anything that happened then. Not because of any saving to myself, but I was so thankful to see that he had a notion of restitution. As for the kindness of the friends in the neighbourhood, it almost oppressed me, I had such a number of good wishes and such pretty presents. But what pleased me most of all, I think, was a parcel from Germany, containing a note of congratulations from Mrs. Temple, and a few lines from Miss Milicent, accompanied by some specimens of Swiss wood-carving, a salad fork and spoon, and a paper knife, and a very pretty dish to stand on the table in my parlour.

Mrs. Temple's note, though short, helped me to understand the blessing of being "in charity with all men." As for Miss Milicent, her congratulations were so hearty that they made the tears come into my eyes; whilst I felt truly humbled by the thought of how little they were deserved. "Dear Ursie Grant," she wrote; "you have been a good sister, and a good friend, and God's blessing is upon you, and be sure He will

prosper you. I shall say a hearty prayer for you on your wedding-day, as I have done every day of my life for many years. People declare that the saints know what is going on upon earth; I don't pretend to judge upon that point, for never having been where they are, and there being nothing about it in the Bible, I should think it presumption to decide; but if my mother, who was a saint if ever there was one, knows anything about your plans, she will for certain give you her blessing on your marriage; and as we can't say surely, I send it to you for her, praying God that in all times of trouble, you may meet with a friend as true as yourself, and a greater good in an earthly way, I can't ask for any one. And so, good-bye, — and I hope before long to come back to England, and to see you and John Hervey at your cottage.

"From your most sincere and affectionate friend,

"MILICENT WEIR.

"P.S. I should like to know what the rent of the Heath is now. I hear the house has changed hands. I have quite forgiven John Hervey, and think him a wise man, and worthy to be your husband. And I beg you will give him my good wishes, and tell him so."

Time sped on so quickly, my wedding-day drew near before I seemed at all ready for it, though what remained to be done, concerned others more than myself. Roger wanted to make a list of things which it would be well for Jessie to attend to; he asked me to write down what I did with the servants in the way of teaching them, and what my rules were. He was bent upon having a strict, regular household; and Jessie tried very much to follow what I suggested. Of course I was obliged to make a good many changes; for with her baby to attend to, she could not possibly undertake all that I did; and Roger was very considerate, not at all wishing to press her. What she could not do, he said, he would try to do himself; and with this help I had no fears for Jessie.

She had many, however, for herself. We were talking

together on the Saturday before my marriage, which was to be on the Tuesday following, — sitting in the deep window-seat in the parlour, the baby lying in my lap, — for, now the time seemed so short, I made Jessie spare it to me whenever I had a moment's leisure. It was a beautiful calm evening, and the fresh scent of the mignonette and roses in the garden, and the myrtle which was trained against the wall, seemed quite to fill the room. Home seemed very pleasant and dear to me now I was going to leave it, and I said so to Jessie.

"Oh! Ursie," she answered, and tears filled her eyes; "how I shall miss you. Looking back ever so long, I have always depended upon you; and I can't go to Roger for every little thing."

"You must learn to do so," I said; "he likes it, and he is never impatient."

"No, never, — but, — Ursie, — I think a woman can understand one's foolish ways, and make allowance for them. I never feel afraid of owning how ignorant I am to you."

"You won't be ignorant soon," I said; "you are setting to work to learn so fast."

"But it is late to begin," she answered, "after one is married. If I could only go back! Ah! little one," and she bent down to look at the baby; "you shall never be such a thoughtless lassie as your mother."

"You never can remember your mother," I said; "that makes a great difference."

"Perhaps it is an excuse; I don't know — I believe it was in me to be bad, Ursie. I always pray that baby may take after Roger, and not after me. I never like to hear people say she is like me."

"There is no need for her to be so very different, dear Jessie," I replied; "all that she will want will be more careful training than you ever had."

"I don't mean to spoil her," she answered.

"I am sury you don't. But, Jessie, may I tell you what my fear is?"

"*Yes, speak out*; I don't care what I hear from you."

"Well, then! I am afraid you won't begin training her soon enough; and I think, too, that perhaps Roger will fall into the same mistake. He was inclined to indulge me when I was little."

"Would you have me scold her at once?" said Jessie, laughing, as she stooped down to kiss her baby. "You have a cruel aunt Ursie, little one."

"I think the training of a child, as far as obedience is concerned, ought to be over by the time it is five years old," I replied.

Jessie started.

"Yes," I continued, "I know it sounds extremely cruel, but one thing I am quite sure of, that little things of that age will bear any amount of strictness, — of course I don't mean unkindness, — but strict order and discipline as to obedience, so long as they have great tenderness shown them at the same time. Children, I believe, are actually taught to be disobedient by the folly of their parents."

"I don't want obedience half so much as love," said Jessie.

"You will never get one without the other," I replied. "Disobedience is selfishness; and a selfish child does not properly understand what love means."

"And what is to be done after five years old?" asked Jessie.

"I suppose good example," was my reply; "a sterner discipline for oneself than one would like to attempt with a child, great earnestness, and especially great calmness, and a ready sympathy and tenderness of manner."

"I shall not be wanting in tenderness," said Jessie; "I shall love my little one too well for that."

"What I should fear most for myself," I said, "would be impatience. I know from experience that no amount of affection will do away with the effects of a hasty word. An irritable person can never gain confidence; not that you are *irritable*, Jessie; I was speaking more of what I remember in my own childhood. William, when he did pet me, was much

more indulgent than Roger; but I never felt sure of him, and so I never opened my heart to him."

"If my baby is to be taught by good example, there will be very little hope for her," said Jessie, "except that she has a father as well as a mother."

"I scarcely see how she is to be taught without example," I said. "I remember hearing Miss Milicent lecture the children at Compton about reverence, talking to them in a loud voice in church, just as the service was about to begin. Naturally enough they became irreverent directly; whereas one look at Roger was sufficient to make one remember where one was. And, Jessie, as to reverence, I cannot but think, if we mean to make a child reverent to God, we must begin by making it reverent to its father and mother."

"Roger will do that," said Jessie.

"Yes, I think he will; it is in him. But a great deal must depend on the mother. You know Mrs. Kemp brought up Mary in that way. Many times I have heard her say, 'My dear, you may take liberties with your companions, but you must never take them with me.' Mary was obliged to come in and out of the room quietly, and to stand aside for her mother to pass; and was so particular about saying, 'Thank you;' and every thing her mother did for her was considered such a favour. It quite shocks me sometimes now to see children make slaves of their parents as they do, fancying that their only business is to please and work for them."

"I should never have thought Mary Kemp had been brought up in that way," said Jessie; "she always gave me the notion of being so independent, and going her own way without contradiction. I know when Aunt Morris used to scold me so much, I used to think of Mary with envy, because it seemed as though she did just as she liked, and was never found fault with."

"That was because there was no occasion to find fault with her," I replied. "Mrs. Kemp declared that she never had cause really to scold Mary after she was fifteen. You see she had been brought up so well till then, that her mother

was able to let the reins loose, and so, just when she was beginning to have a will of her own — as girls will have at that age — it was a right will which there was no occasion to oppose. I remember Mrs. Kemp saying to me one day that what mothers frequently do is to spoil their children up to five years old, try experiments upon them up to fifteen, and then contradict them up to twenty, and by that time there is an end to confidence, and too often to love."

"I should be afraid," said Jessie, "that all that kind of strictness would make a child so formal, and so afraid of its mother."

"No doubt it will where there is no tenderness or sympathy," I replied. "But Mrs. Kemp has such a very affectionate way with her, and throws herself so heartily into her children's pleasures, that it would be quite impossible to be afraid of her. As for being cold mannered to children, it seems to me impossible, though I know people who are so upon what they call principle, thinking it right, they say, to teach self-control. As if children's affections could be destroyed by shutting up the natural vent, and as if they were not the very means God has given us to soften necessary discipline. I don't think myself one can be too affectionate to children if one is only strict at the same time."

"Well! Ursie," said Jessie, laughing, "there is only one thing to be done that I can see, you must just go and tell John Hervey that I can't spare you, for I shall never bring up my child rightly without you."

"I have been preaching, I know," I said, feeling rather ashamed of myself; "and I have no business to do so."

"You shall preach to baby when she grows old enough," said Jessie; "I am sure it will do her the greatest possible good."

"No, indeed," I said, heartily; "I hate preaching, I don't think any good is ever done by it."

"*Yes*, you have done me good," replied Jessie.

"*Because* you sought the preaching, as you choose to call

it," I replied. "But, Jessie, if I had thrust it upon you, I should only have made you angry."

"Still one must preach a little," replied Jessie; "or how is my poor baby ever to become what she should be?"

"Teach, but not preach," I said; "at least, to judge by myself, children like teaching very much, but preaching they can't endure. It makes them shrink like a sensitive leaf when it is touched."

"And so my little one is to grow up like a heathen," said Jessie, half smiling at her own exaggeration.

"So far as a baptized child, who is taught to pray, and read the Bible, and say its Catechism, and obey its parents, can be a heathen," I said.

"But that is not all, Ursie," said Jessie, earnestly.

"What there is beyond, must, I should think, be left to God," was my reply. "We can't give grace ourselves, you know, Jessie, and we shall never make it grow by searching into the heart to see if it is there. But I believe that the grace will never be wanting, if a child is kept in the way of duty and obedience, while we are at the same time thoroughly in earnest ourselves, and pray heartily for God's blessing and guidance. The good seed may not appear just in the way, or at the time we wish; but it will ripen in due time one may be certain."

Jessie bent sadly over her baby. "If I could only be sure," she said; "but I have gone so far wrong myself. I often think that my punishment will be sent to me through my little one."

"You must remember Roger," I replied.

"Oh, yes! that is my comfort. A blessing must rest upon his child, Ursie; don't you think so?"

"I am certain of it," I said.

"Baby is like him, the eyes are like, aren't they?" continued Jessie; "she does not take only after me."

I looked into the clear dark eyes, already beginning to dawn with something like intelligence, and fancied I saw in

them the traces of the earnest, generous spirit, which had been my guide and support through life.

"If she was a boy she would be just like him," said Jessie.

"But being a girl she is not at all like him," said a merry voice. John Hervey came up to the window, and Roger with him.

"What are you two wasting your time about?" asked John.

"Planning to make a wise woman of Roger's daughter," I said.

John came round into the room. "I don't believe she is a daughter yet," he said; "or any thing but an 'it.' Hand her over to me, Ursie. I seem scarcely to have looked at her." I did as he bade me. Roger half sat, half leaned on the window-sill, gazing intently upon the baby's face; presently he said: "She is not a little Christian yet; she will be to-morrow, please God; but we have not settled upon a name for her."

"Oh! yes," I exclaimed, "you have. She is to be Jessie, of course, if you insist upon only one name."

"Jessie won't have it so," replied Roger, gravely.

"No! why not?" I looked at Jessie, and repented that I had asked the question. Her eyes were swimming with tears.

Roger put his hand upon her fondly. "My little woman, why mustn't it be? you see Ursie thinks it right."

Jessie wiped away her tears, but still she answered: "I can't, Roger, indeed, I can't have it. She must never be Jessie in anything."

"Not if I wish it?" he said.

"Not if you wish it. You don't understand now what Jessie is."

"I understand she is my darling little wife," replied Roger.

Jessie looked up at him with an expression of almost painful gratitude. "Not Jessie," she whispered, "but Ursula." And Roger turned to me, as I was standing close to him, and

giving me one of those kisses which seem to concentrate in them years of affection, he joined my hand with John's, and said, "It seems too much to ask for the blessing of a second Ursula Grant."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

No one can expect me to describe my wedding day. If I were to attempt it, it would not be like the reality, for in truth I had but a very indistinct consciousness of anything that was passing around me that morning. I remember only Jessie's sweet smiles and tearful eyes, and Roger's more than fatherly thoughtfulness, and William's kindness, and much, much more that was good and pleasant from neighbours and friends; and above all, the one happy, honest-hearted, loving countenance, which was now dearer to me than all others. How I was dressed, how I looked, may have been a matter of consequence to others, it was very little to me. John was satisfied, and I cared for nothing else; and the dearest ornament which I wore was the moss rose bud gathered by him and given me in exchange for one which I had laughingly insisted should be worn in his button hole on his wedding morning.

If marriage is an awful thing to those who merely look on upon it, it is far too sacred and solemn to be described by those who actually take part in it.

Rather I would tell of my first arrival at my new home a fortnight afterwards; — the pretty gable-ended cottage, covered with creepers; the pleasant little parlour, ornamented with my wedding presents; and having casement windows that looked out upon a tiny bit of lawn, a large kitchen garden, and a paddock beyond, in which two cows and a pony were feeding; the view from the arbour of Compton Church and the ruined oratory on St. Anne's Hill, the soothing murmur of the sea, which had been familiar to me from infancy; and the pealing welcome from the merry church bells. The cottage was within reach of all I loved and cared for. The

bright evening when we first drank tea in it as our home, seemed the omen of a happy life; and, God be thanked, it has not failed. I have lived to love and honour my husband every day more and more. I am the mother of three children, whom God has blest with health and good dispositions. I have a competency for the present, and faith for the future; and if I have known cares, and disappointments, and anxieties, they are but the lot of all; and I trust that through God's infinite Mercy, they are doing the work of training for Eternity.

That is the thought which is now most often with me; for years hurry on and bring with them the consciousness that one is hastening to the time when all these earthly blessings must be left, and God must be all in all. There are moments when I think of my husband and my children, and feel as though I could cling hold of life, grasping it with all my strength, that it should not be taken from me. Those are moments of temptation, the temptation of a happy married life; but there are others when God gives me another and a holier feeling; when I can place all in His hands, lying still before Him and waiting cheerfully for whatever may be to come, because I have learnt not only to trust, but to love Him. I fear it is almost bold to say so, yet Mrs. Weir often talked to me about it. It is a feeling which comes to me most often in the long summer evenings, when the children are asleep, and I am waiting for John to return from some business which has taken him to a distance. Then I often kneel and pray whilst the moon shines full into my window; and the soft night breezes rise, seeming to wail for the world's sorrows whilst it sleeps. The deep sounds in the calm, awful light, might well make me tremble, even if they did not make me sad. But it is not so; I can feel rest then, which I seldom do in the day—rest which is quite rest, which has no wish for anything but to remain rest. I know that I have God quite close to me, and I can say what comes into my mind and be sure that every word is understood. I can tell Him of my love for my precious *earthly* treasures, and yet feel that He, who knows my heart, *sees that it* is truth, when I say how I have longed all my life

with a great, great longing to love some Being quite Perfect; and how, now I have found what I wanted, — even Him who in his wondrous mercy gave Himself for me, — and can give all in return — all, every wish and hope and joy, not wishing to keep anything back, caring for those whom he has given me here, as He only knows, but turning again to Him, oh! with such a rush at my heart! — it makes the tears come, because it is so happy.

If God should give me that feeling when I am called to die, — death would be great joy.

But I must work for Him now; and there is still much to be done, both for myself and others.

I see Roger and Jessie often. I think and believe they are happy; not so happy as John and I — our lot is rare in its blessedness, and Jessie, gentle and affectionate though she is, can never fully supply all the needs of such a heart as Roger's, — yet so happy as to feel that they are journeying on the same road to the same home of peace. They have but one child. I sometimes am inclined to wish they had more, when I see what a pet she is; and yet for myself I am quite contented, for I could never love another so well, and I should not wish to be partial. My own children are dear to me beyond what words can express. It would be folly to suppose that any other love could ever equal that of a mother; yet there is a peculiar feeling connected with little Ursula; a remembrance of the first moment when I held her in my arms and thought of her as Roger's child, that must always give her a claim upon my heart, with which no one else can interfere. Inherited love — the love that clings to the child because the parent has been dear — is a strong tie; and the second Ursula Grant is far more gentle and loving and teachable than the first ever was or will be. Her uncle William is her great charge; and she waits upon him with a devotion and thoughtfulness, mingled with much of her father's early piety, which are very touching; and often I think that Roger is blessed, *through his child*, by seeing his brother gradually but surely

brought to follow in the same good path which he himself has so long trod.

Farmer Kemp is growing old, but works as heartily as ever; and Mrs. Kemp is young again in the happiness of having a married daughter and grand-children. Miss Milicent is settled at the Heath. Her father's death, which took place about two years after my marriage, relieved her of the claim upon her fortune, and she has now a small but sufficient income, which is managed oddly still, but far more sensibly than in days of yore. She is a busy and useful person, always having some plans of charity in her head, and occasionally much perplexing Mr. and Mrs. Richardson by her desire to carry them out. But she is not wilful as she was. Past lessons have not been forgotten, and when she is very unmanageable, Mr. Richardson generally applies to me, and a little talk in our parlour, or a conversation on the sea shore, whilst the children, of whom she is very fond, are picking up shells, and searching for Miss Milicent's "creatures," seldom fails to bring her to reason. It is not my own sense or eloquence which can affect her, but God's grace working through the remembrance of her mother. Truly, I often think to myself, "the path of the just is like the shining light" in more ways than one, for it is a guide through many a darkened way.

And Dene — the bright home of my childhood, the lovely spot in which my heart knew its earliest and most untroubled joy! —

Miss Milicent's prophecy has come true, it has followed the fortunes of her family.

I will describe it as I last visited it.

I walked over St. Anne's hill, and along the top of the down, but when I wished to descend the sloping green path, I found myself stopped by fences and ditches, for the end of the down was enclosed, and Dene was no longer accessible in that direction. I went down on the other side, and made my way at the back of the plantation, till I came to a gate opening into the direct road to Hove. It was barred and padlocked.

I clambered over it, and went up to the house. The shrubbery was grown into a thick dark plantation; the broad road was green with damp; the woodwork of the stables, the coach house, and the cottage was unpainted; the clock was silent. A woman with a little child appeared at the front door, wondering apparently to see any living being. She told me that I might walk round, and I went to the little gate leading to the side entrance, and when I opened it found the path blocked up, and made my way by stooping amidst overgrown laurels to the front of the house.

No verandah was to be seen; the work of the old carpenter, which had been the pride and ornament of the place, and the wonder of the neighbourhood, had vanished entirely; — the plain stone house stood in its bare desolation, with only the broad pavement before it. I turned to the lawn, once so exquisitely smooth and soft. It was fast becoming rank grass. Two straggling flower beds were left, but without a flower to brighten them. The fountains had ceased to play, the ponds were nearly empty, the walks round the garden were so overgrown that I did not attempt to pass by them, nor even to mount the steps of my favourite seat. In the inside of the house a few pieces of furniture still remained in the two sitting-rooms, making a mockery of comfort; the bed-rooms were empty.

I asked the woman what was to be done with the place, and she told me that she believed it was to be sold to a stranger, and the house was to be pulled down.

Such is Dene now.

In a few years another and a grander house may stand on its site. Lovelier flowers and walks, and fountains may then adorn it; eyes more fitted to appreciate may look on it with delight, and lips more eloquent far than mine may speak its praise. But to me Dene is gone for ever.

And the happiness associated with it, the rush of glee, the entrancing dreams, the thrill of wondering admiration? —

vain, indeed, would be the effort by any power of wealth and taste to recall that cloudless joy. It is to be found but in the blessed memories of childhood and the glorious prophecies of heaven.

THE END.

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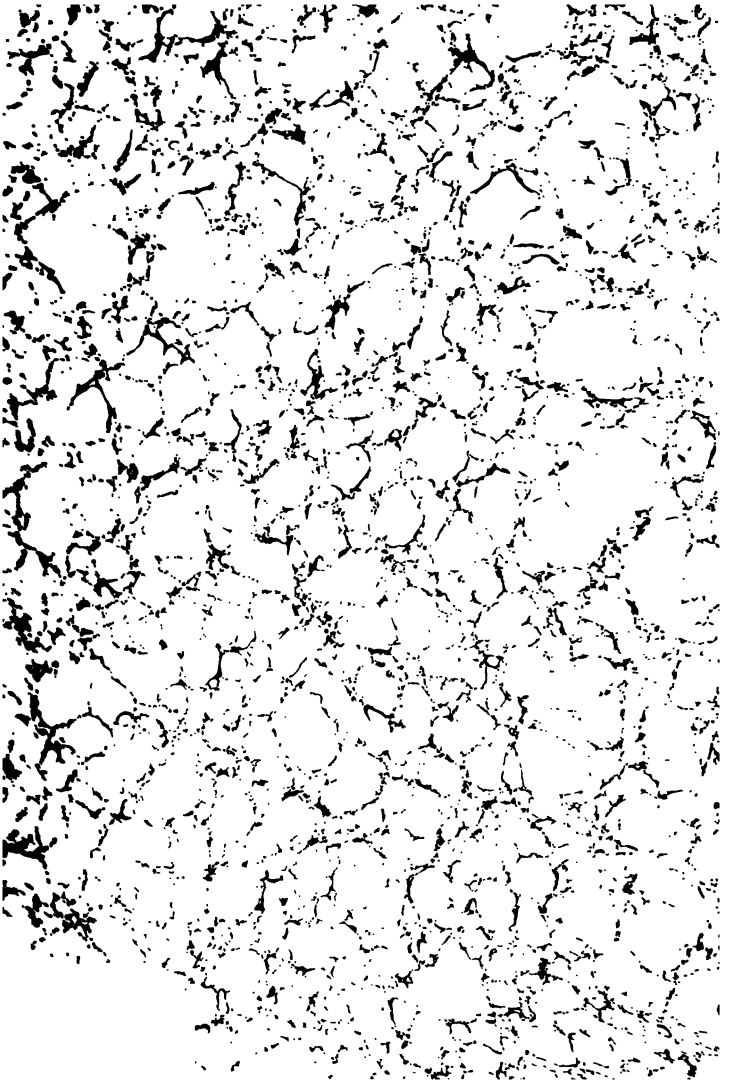

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